

DECEMBER

EYE OF MEDUSA by CHARLES CREIGHTON

25¢

fantastic

ANC

ADVENTURES



The entire Solar System
shuddered under the **REVENGE OF THE ROBOTS**

By LAWRENCE CHANDLER

MEN BEHIND *fantastic* ADVENTURES



TOM BEECHAM

SOMETIMES, when an incomplete illustration isn't working out too well, I believe I could write volumes about myself. But since those things probably wouldn't be printable, I'll write this while I am still feeling flattered at being asked to do so.

My pre-draft life was spent roaming around the mountains of Western Colorado with my two faithful dogs, my imagination, and a fishing rod or gun. A hitch in the Navy as a Corpsman in the South Pacific put a stop

to that. After the war I struggled through several years at the St. Louis School of Fine Arts, Washington University.

My dreams of the future include the space-happy desire to be a member of the first expedition into outer space; to live a long life on a ranch in Colorado raising kids (the first of which is on the way), dogs, and cows; to go fishing whenever I wish; and to be a good illustrator.

* * * *

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

E. BRUCE YACHES stopped up at the office yesterday afternoon to drop off some fact articles which we had assigned to him. We were having a semantic exercise with the word *stubborn* and he joined the discussion, which turned out to be a hot and heavy ore.

ACCORDING to the dictionary, *stubborn* means "inflexible in opinion or intention; unreasonably obstinate; persistent." But, actually, at what point does *stubborn* become inflexible in intention, which is often for the good—or unreasonably obstinate which at best is bad? Where is the line drawn?

HOW OFTEN has stubbornness aligned with perseverance to produce the fulfillment of a worthwhile ambition? History is filled with the stories of men who flaunted the popular beliefs of their day and followed their own opinions.

AND WERE proven right. Like Christopher Columbus. To all outward intents and purposes, he was being unreasonably obstinate—downright stupid—in spending a fortune to seek the West Indies. Everybody who was in a position to know anything, knew that the earth was flat—scientists, astronomers, masters of the sea, whoever had the experience and the know-how. But Columbus was *stubborn*—and persistent—and sure of his facts. And he discovered this continent.

ABRAM LINCOLN was a man stalked by failure. Raised in impoverished circumstances, self-taught, suffering a great deal of personal heartbreak, his early years suffered from a singular lack of success. Yet, he persevered—and reached the highest accolade our nation can offer.

THERE WAS Thomas Wolfe, who taught English composition to college freshmen, and hated every minute of it. He wrote nights, when he should have been grading his students' themes. He turned out to be one of the leading novelists this country has produced.

LUDWIG von BEETHOVEN was a poor failure, leading a miserable life. His musical efforts were discounted, sloughed

off, in his own lifetime. But he kept right on trying, and his greatest symphonies were written after he turned completely deaf, when a man less stubborn would have just quit.

FROM THE early caveman who stubbornly worked to keep the flames of the first fire going, to present-day man slaving over the formula of a new healing drug—the inflexibility of purpose has been the driving force.

BUT IT WORKS the other way, too. Julius Caesar, Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolph Hitler, countless others of whom we never hear—they, too, have been driven by stubbornness and an inflexibility of opinion.

SO JUST plain stubbornness isn't enough to gain enduring success. In addition to the stubborn perseverance, your goal has to be sound, and your convictions must work toward helping, rather than subjugating, mankind. . . . LES



"How do I know? I guess they passed the test . . ."

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All Stories Complete

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REVENGE OF THE ROBOTS (Novel—30,000) by Lawrence Chandler 6

Illustrated by Ed Emsler

Bent upon publicity, the Earthlings were too preoccupied to see the baleful threat existing upon Planet Z — until it looked in the window.

EYE OF MEDUSA (Short—4,500) by Charles Crichton 60

Illustrated by William Slade

Out of old India came the promise of destruction by evil gods more ancient than the memory of man. Or were the gods and the evil as new as tomorrow?

MAKE WAY FOR YOUR CORPSE (Short—2,500) by Milton Lesser 76

Illustrated by Gaylord Welker

Mr. Slegg was a harmless little fellow who never did anything right. He even made a botch of dying and became two Mr. Sleggs. The result? Wow!

HELL IS UP ABOVE (Novel—25,000) by Stuart Faulkner 82

Illustrated by Nobu Shimotanka

Wise men have said that heaven and hell are states of mind. Thus Larry Higgins discovered the beauty he found in space was the hell he'd brought.

Cover by Robert Gibson Jones

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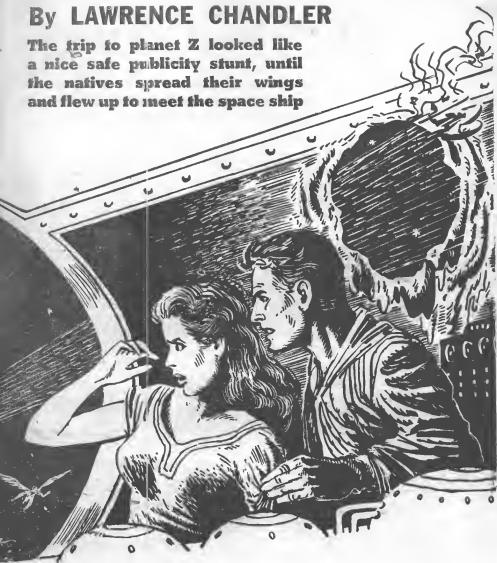
REVENGE of the ROBOTS



A deadly hostility marked their every move

By LAWRENCE CHANDLER

The trip to planet Z looked like a nice safe publicity stunt, until the natives spread their wings and flew up to meet the space ship



LARRY LIPTON turned to see how the others were. Focus Forgan was just coming out of it. She was shaking his head in the manner of a dog getting out of a bath, and the red drops of blood kept slipping out of his nostrils and splattering the walls. Gloria Kane was still unconscious, but Larry could see the rise and fall of her breasts. The shock of entering the

charged atmosphere had been worse for her than for the two men.

Larry turned again to the instrument panel, knowing it was a futile gesture. Many things had been taken into account, but certainly not this. He cursed under his breath. They were lost, at the mercy of this terrible spatial storm, blown here, thrown there, the space sphere like a balloon

wholly at the mercy of the elements.

He pulled his belt in another notch and found his mind going back to the months before the flight. Not to the beginning, but right after. The months of work, research and labor which had gone into making the flight a successful one. A grunted sound which might have been called laughter welled in his throat. To think that man even presumed definite knowledge of the forces of the great wastes which some called outer space.

Oh, sure! The government had placed many special agents at their disposal. Had even permitted them to use the precious metal Solminum, the metal which was impervious to heat and cold; there was a ten foot thickness in the outer shell alone. Space-weather men had been placed at their disposal, had plotted their course to take advantage of weather. The four-hundred-inch scope on Rainer had been used for three months previous to the start of the flight, radar-electronic recording devices had measured and calculated the exact path they had to take, had looked far enough into the future for them so that they *knew* just what to expect. Everything had been just so-so.

He looked back at the arms and equipment locker. Three heat-energy rifles lay snugly in their cases in the locker. Thirty thousand rounds of fire power, thirty heat-energy pills, in three cases. And the pistols whose power alone could stop ten men in a tandem line. There were three of those. Then of course there were the atmosphere suits, helmets and body coverings, made of treated *Mu'in*, to be worn as a precaution should their testing apparatus show a deficiency of atmosphere.

This time Larry's laugh was not forced. What the heck are you worried about, he asked himself. You

can only die once. A pity, though. He would have liked to know this Kane dame better. She was certainly tele-casty. A mewing sound made him turn his head quickly and his grey-green eyes met the tawny ones of Gloria Kane. She smiled, a sickly one, and whispered:

"Are we all right?"

"Right as rain," came his answer. And with it the crooked grin which Tom Heine had once called his 'sure-fire asset'.

Her eyes closed once more and Larry turned again to the pitch blackness of outer space. And once more his thoughts went to the past, this time to the very beginning of it all.

IT HAD started with a call to Tom Heine's office. The short, big-bellied producer was seated at his desk, the inevitable black Havana clenched tightly between his lips, his beetle-brows settled squarely over the bridge of his pudgy nose in what to others was a terrifying expression but to Larry just a comical feature, adjunct to the rest of the man.

"Larry," Heine said. "Trouble again."

Larry walked to the exercycle Heine used, mounted it and began a furious pedaling on the stationary bike.

Heine's face turned beet-red in exasperation. He got up from behind the desk and waddled over to the bike. "Damn it! Listen, Larry! Ya gotta listen!"

"Sure, Mike. Sure," Larry replied, his eyes lowered. "What's with you?"

"Don't call me Mike!" Heine howled.

"Shall we say Ike, then?" Larry said, a grin breaking on his lips. "How fast do you think I'm going?"

Heine bent his head before he was conscious he had done the other's unworled bidding. "'Bout thirty-five,"

he said before he could stop. "Now look!" he said, sharp'y this time.

And Larry looked across at the other. Something in Heine's voice made him realize that whatever the movie producer had on his mind was of a serious nature. "I'm lookin' and listenin'," Larry said as he straightened.

"Okay! Grant Hayes is in his office right now waiting for an answer," Heine said. He took the cigar from between his lips, looked at it with marked disapproval—his doctor had warned him about too many of the damned things—and put it back in its corner. "Hayes says we've got to have an answer today. Says it's the biggest break we can get. And he's already in debt to the tune of a hundred thousand dollars because of it."

"That's nice," Larry said as he threw one leg over the bars and made himself more comfortable. "So break the mystery to me. Or do I have to plant my own clues? What's it all about?"

"It's all about Gloria Kane," Heine began. "The Lady Daredevil"....

Larry made a face of disgust. He had heard of this Kane gal. She had flown non-stop from Jupiter to Earth, the first woman in history to make the trip, though several men had done it, including Larry himself. It proved nothing except that the girl had lots of nerve and a complete disregard for her life. Larry's personal opinion was that she was headline crazy....

"....Hayes signed her to an exclusive contract," Heine went on. "'Zenith Tele-cast' has all rights to Miss Kane's activities for tele-casting purposes. I gotta admit the girl is tele-casty. Very! Face, figure and personality. But to get back to Hayes and the mystery. He gets the bright idea of having Miss Kane fly non-stop to Planet Z. And having the whole trip

tele-cast to the states, mind you."

Larry almost fell from the exercycle from shock. To Planet Z! Why Hayes must be crazy, Larry thought. The only space ships which had the power and authority to do that were government ships. Besides, what was the point?

HEINE HAD the answer: "There's gotta be a first to everything. He got permission from the government. They don't care if a citizen wants to risk his or her neck. But you can't stay for more than twenty-four hours on the planet—"

"Me!" Larry howled. "Who the hell brought me into this deal?"

"I did," Heine admitted glumly. It had been such an excellent idea. Larry Lipton was a free-lance to be sure. But Heine knew Larry liked working for him. So he had assumed Larry would surely take the job. He had even spoken for Larry to Hayes when the subject of relief pilot and navigator came up. Now he was no longer sure. Damn! He was going to have to put on an act. "I know, Larry," he went on in the same vein, as if no words could convey the sorrow he felt. "I opened my big yap without thinking. But can you blame me?"

"You know how I've always felt about you. Haven't I always said Larry Lipton has more talent, looks, personality, than any five top-grade tele-cast stars? So what does Lipton do? Stunt work!"

"Sure," Larry said. "And why not? What the heck did you want of me? I'm not interested in women mewing over me, like a tabby over a Tom. Or in having school girls form clubs and naming dogs after me. I like stunt work. It pays me enough money so that I have what I want, and can get what I don't have if I do want it."

"That's what I mean, Larry," Heine

broke in quickly. He had an idea Larry was going to get mad about the whole thing. Unless he had something else to think about. "It's been you all the time, hasn't it? Has it ever occurred to you that you may owe a debt to someone other than yourself?"

"Hey!" Larry yelped. "Wait-a-minute! I don't owe a dime to anyone."

"Were we speaking of money?" Heine asked in dulcet tones. "Or is that all that's on your mind? You know we'll pay the limit..."

Larry felt shame. "Go on. And forget about money. You know I'd work for nothing if you asked me to, you fat Dutchman!"

"...Thanks, Larry," Heine went on. His stomach warmed at the words. Larry was such a right guy! "You know I didn't mean that. It's just the spot the fat Dutchman is in now that bothers me. Wait! I'll explain."

"Tom Heine can go back to laying bricks and mortar and forms for concrete if this deal fails. That's right! I've sunk every dime I have and all I could borrow. If we miss, well, maybe I'll be happier being a building contractor, like in the old days."

"You couldn't be happy doing any other thing," Larry said warmly. "And you know it! Besides, you're the only honest man in the industry. We can't afford to lose you. I got it, Tom. See how right I am. Hayes got permission from the F. C. C. to use their exclusive tele-wave pattern from Planet Z to the Earth. In twenty-four hours we can show the whole planet, and get the tele-cast copyright. There'll be a fortune in it, all right. Sure! That's it. With Planet Z as the outside station between Earth and all outer space it has a tremendous importance to us, especially since they intercepted signals from the mystery planet in the dark nebulae beyond Orion. The papers were full of it ten months ago."

"Then Venus intercepted some signals. And after that we didn't get a thing, until we discovered Planet Z and found that they were in a perfect spot for reception. And that's why the government clamped down on all space travel to the planet. I'm just curious as to how Hayes got permission."

HEINE HAD been listening in downright admiration. Larry had figured the thing out, but exactly. And he was right. "Well, it seems that Hayes got in on the ground floor because of the educational end of the tele-cast. We get the copyright for three years for purposes of education. After, we can use the copyright to any purpose we see fit. Which still makes it a terrific deal. Right?"

"And how."

"So let's go to Hayes' office and tell him you're in on the deal. You, 'Focus' Forgan and Miss Kane."

"Focus Forgan!" Larry growled and gave up. If there was a man he disliked, it was Forgan. Loud, a drinker, a man-with-the-women sort of character who had a way with a tele-camera, Larry hated the other's guts. And Heine knew it. But Forgan was the best man in the business and Hayes was interested only in getting results. Personal enmities had no place in their project, Hayes had said. Those were Tom Heine's words, after Larry blew his top.

"Okay," Larry said. "Might as well get it over with. Let's go."

"Fine. Fine!" Heine was affability itself, as they started off. "Besides, you'll get to meet Miss Kane. She's there too."

Larry looked with interest at the woman who was standing by the side of Frederick Hayes. They had their backs to the two who had entered, and Hayes was deep in explanation of a

blueprint on the wall. They turned as Heine cleared his throat and Hayes smiled his thin-lipped banker's smile at the two men. He was a tall man, slender, severely though impeccably dressed, with a taste for dark suits and imported shirts. He had a narrow, well-groomed face, whose predominating features were a pair of steel-grey eyes which had authority in them. Hayes was a fighter. And between him and Heine they had built Zenith Tele-cast to the apex of the business.

But Larry had seen Hayes before. It was the woman who held his attention. If this was Gloria Kane she was all Tom Heine had said. What was more, she knew how to dress. Tailored clothes of good taste and cut showed her figure to perfection. She did not affect bangles and spangles as other women did, nor were her fingers adorned with rings. He noticed in passing that there was no marriage band on her finger. And smiled within him that he should notice it.

"Well," Hayes' voice boomed in bass tones. "So you've brought Larry along. Good, Tom! Now, Miss Kane, I want to introduce Larry Lipton, your co-pilot and navigator. Larry, Gloria Kane—"

She thrust a hand out and Larry took it, and felt the strength of her fingers in the sudden nervous grip she gave him.

"Delighted, Larry," she said. "I've heard about you. All to the good."

"Yeah?" Larry's voice was a needle-sharp lance. "I heard about you too. You're pretty good, the papers say."

He didn't quite know why he said what he did. He knew it sounded bad, and certainly there hadn't been any call for his sarcasm. But she should have acted otherwise, and not been so pleasant.

"Look, buster!" her voice matched

his, only her's was a shade colder. "I don't want any trouble and I'm not looking for any. This wasn't my idea; it was Hayes' here. And if I'm going to have some sky-cowboy acting cutely jealous because a woman's got the important end of this flight, he can go chase kites. You're not the only man can navigate. So get this straight. You'll either take orders from me or you can forget the invitation you've had to join up."

"Sorry, Miss Kane," Larry's voice held icicles in it. "Guess I talked out of turn. It won't happen again."

SHE SMILED, trying to break the ice. "That's all right. Lordy! A man's entitled to a mad once in a while. I know I blow up sometimes when... Okay. We'll forget it!" she had seen his eyes remained immune to her plea though his lips shaped a silly grin. "Here, Mister Lipton. Take a look at this."

She pointed to the blueprint on the wall. Larry moved to her side and became aware that she also knew how to apply perfume. It was such a clean odor, with a fragrance which barely made itself felt. He liked it. Then Hayes' voice was explaining the blueprint:

"Grove Aeronautic Inc. are making the space sphere for us. The inner shell is complete. The government is letting us use enough Solminum for a ten-foot-thick outer shell. In a week you, Miss Kane and Forgan will go to Mt. Rainier to the observatory where you'll brief up on weather for the trip. By the time you'll return we'll be about ready for a test flight. How does that strike you?"

"It's okay with me," Larry said. They parted on that note.

And three months to the day, the space sphere was in readiness. Larry

would rather have started without the usual Hollywood trimmings. But it was only good publicity to have photographers, writers from magazines, feature men from the news syndicates, and government officials at the take-off. Larry hated it. But Gloria Kane seemed to revel in it. As for Focus Forgan, he mugged as if the whole thing had been planned solely for him.

Then the shooting ended, the newsmen and magazine feature writers took their last notes, Gloria stepped within the sphere and Larry flipped the switch which closed the hatch, and in a moment Gloria took the controls. There was an expectant hush, a smile from the girl, and they were off.

Larry was in the co-pilot's seat, Gloria was at the controls, and Forgan had a seat which had been built especially for him, where he could always be at the tele-camera. For, from the very beginning, the flight was on the tele-waves.

Forgan was a roughneck. He looked like it, acted like it, and talked like it. He had a thick, muscular body, a face that was heavily fleshed, with a broken nose, a memento of the days when he fought for a living, and a shock of heavy red hair.

It was strange, but there had been no trouble from Forgan at the observatory. It was evident that Hayes had talked to the man and had warned him about making trouble. Yet Forgan made no bones about his dislike. It was just that he wasn't too obvious. Rather it was in his complete indifference to Larry that the co-pilot felt resentful. In fact up to the very last minute Forgan kept the peace. But once the hatch was closed and they were off he changed.

"Well, pretty boy," Forgan said, turning his head in Larry's direction. "This thing ought to pay off pretty

good for you, pretty darned good."

"What do you mean, bird-brain?" Larry asked.

"A cinch. Zenith Tele-cast grooms Pretty-boy Lipton for feature roles on the strength of this. Don't forget, you televise just like an angel. Or that's what the gals say."

OH, OH, LARRY thought. So Forgan had been saving his cracks just for now. He kept a tight grip on himself. But not the girl. She had the controls on automatic so she could talk without paying any attention to the panel.

"What's this, Forgan?" she asked.

"Y'mean you didn't know?" Forgan dug it deep. "That this guy's Tom Heine's boy. Sure. The whole thing's just a publicity gag. Lipton's gonna get all the...."

"That's a lie, mug!" Larry spat between his teeth "And you know it."

Forgan's shoulders heaved in a shrug. He slapped his palms together and laughed. "So I'm a liar. But how come they got good-looking for navigator and co-pilot? There must be a dozen guys who've space-travelled. Why Lipton?"

"Maybe he was the best obtainable?" Gloria said.

"Hah! That's a laugh. The best four-flusher!" Forgan growled.

Larry slipped free of the belt, leaped out of the seat and ran to Forgan's side.

"Get out of there, you ape, and I'll show you some four-flushing. Come on!" he yelled.

Forgan's eyes gleamed in delight. He had hoped the needle would make Lipton break. He'd been wanting to slap that pretty face around for a long while. And now he was going to. But he didn't.

"That'll be enough!" the girl's voice bit at them. "What the devil do you

two think you're doing? I've heard about you two. So get this! Save your brawling for the time when we get back. There'll be none of it aboard ship. I'm still boss. One more crack from you, Forgan, and I'll radio for help. I swear it! As for you, Lipton, keep that temper of yours down. I didn't like it when first I heard it and I like it less now. That's all we need, a fight, and this whole trip will blow high as a weather kite...."

Larry's fists were still clenched as he turned and went back to his seat. But the light of reason had returned to his eyes and his brain was hitting on all cylinders. Of course she was right. He should have never allowed Forgan's deliberate needle to penetrate his hide. He manufactured a grin and a quip:

"If you radio for help, someone's liable to say, 'What's the matter, can't you square the billing?'"

BUT SHE wasn't smiling. "Look, Larry," she said. "Let's not talk about billing or tele-casting anymore. What you could do is give me a little information about this Planet Z."

"H'm! There isn't a heck of a lot to tell. It was first observed a couple of years ago—let me see....'81 to be exact. It is, by a long ways, the furthest planet from the sun. I don't know its physical dimensions, but it is the smallest of them all, perhaps half the size of Mercury. No satellites, atmosphere about like Venus, some sort of life but none so complex and varied as we have, though there are creatures of the subhuman species.

"It is what is called a dark planet; it reflects no light for some unexplained reason. But it emits certain rays akin to the cosmic cycle, and it acts for perfect reception for the signals from the nebulae beyond Orion. And that, chillun, is about all I know."

"Thank you, professor," she said lightly. "But the course is not quite complete. What about that magnetic field they told us of at the observatory?"

"Oh, that!" He pretended it was nothing. "I thought you understood? Well, it seems all the planets have a magnetic field. Planet Z has a patterned field. So on our flight map the weather boys laid out minute instructions for approach and landing. And since it might be on your mind as to why they suggested I bring the ship in for a landing, it is because of the magnetic field. I have flown through such fields. When they asked you about landings on Venus and Mercury, you said you hadn't flown to those. Those two planets have similar patterns. So, naturally, they suggested I bring the ship in."

It *had* been on her mind. Now she understood and felt better about it. This time when she smiled, her lips seemed to beg forgiveness that she had felt the way she did about it. He winked at her and turned to the instrument panel again, as if to close the incident.

Forgan had been listening closely. He had to admit a grudging admiration of Larry's knowledge, small though it was. Yet, at Rainier, they had treated him with respect. Oh, Lipton wasn't really a four-flusher. It was just that sometimes the man irritated Forgan. The cameraman went back to his built-in booth and began to tele-cast....

THEY WERE a full day beyond Venus when first Larry noticed something was wrong. Gloria was asleep, as was Forgan. Larry was at the controls, giving them an automatic check-up. They had been set at the start but the check-up was one of his duties. His glance travelled past

the pilot control and went back to it. Something had caught his eye.... His brow knit when he saw what was wrong. The needle was moving in jerks back and forth away from the set-point. It didn't cause him any worry. Just that real work was to be involved if the gauge was wrong. Gloria and he would have to spell each other on manual. He took it off automatic and used his hands. And the furrow deepened on his brow. The pilot was not working at all; the needle continued its variations to either side of 'set-point'.

He leaned back and tried to figure out the cause. But after a moment he gave up, simply because there were too many places in which the trouble might lie. He fished his nav. maps from the drawer, studied them for a while for orientation and set the manuals on. Then he set his course. Only the controls didn't work that way either. And that meant real trouble! The ship was just out of control. He tried everything and nothing worked; he could not rudder it one way or another, he could not gain speed or decrease it, he could do nothing but fiddle with the levers and buttons on the panel, like an infant with a complex set of blocks. And with as little chance of accomplishing anything structural.

He pulled the hand mike out and awakened the girl and Forgan and asked them forward. Forgan was rubbing the sleep from his eyes, growling that it was a hell of a time to call someone, just when sleep was beginning to feel good. But one look at Larry's face and Gloria shut the cameraman up.

"How bad is it?" she asked.

Larry liked that. No silly questions as to what happened. Just a sensible question.

"Pretty bad. Controls are shot."

She paled beneath the tanned skin.

But her voice held not the faintest tremor of fear. "We have clearance past Venus so they'll be on the lookout for us. I don't like doing this but I guess we'll have to radio for help. Darn it!" her voice held an edge of tears.

"Yeah," Larry said. "We have clearance so they'll be watching and giving us room. Trouble is we're going at such speed we're liable to bust right through the freight air lanes which could mean a collision with one of those sky box cars. Well, you're the boss. Radio it'll have to be."

And for once Forgan had no wise-crack.

Larry opened the channel to Venus and began a monotonous and steady call. But after a full minute of it he switched to the Earth channel. He called the beam for perhaps thirty seconds, then switched off altogether. "We're not getting through and I can't raise them. So let's face it. It's in the lap of the gods!"

ANOTHER DAY went by. The space sphere sped through the impenetrable darkness of space with a speed close to that of light. Within, the three occupants whiled away their time at cards, food and talk. Somehow they managed to stay out of the freight lanes. Larry, keeping a constant watch on the course the ship was pursuing, became convinced of a strange thing. He did not communicate his suspicions to either of his companions. But he had more than just an idea that the ship was taking a definite, though mysterious course for an unknown destination. They were going to pass Planet Z by a hundred million miles....

Then, at the beginning of the third twenty-four hours, the spacial storm struck. Gloria was at the controls, writing a letter on the panel. Forgan

was taking a catnap and Larry was listening to a recording of the *Eroica*. It was as if all controls had been taken away from the huge sphere. Larry compared what happened to an incident he had known on a *Star* class sailboat on Lake Michigan when a sudden squall struck.

A thousand needles seemed to have struck him all at the same time. The room was charged with the stuff. He gritted his teeth and waited for the first shock to pass. He knew there would be others. He tried to move, to get to the girl, but he could not move a single muscle, not even those of the voice box. Another shock and a third. Each a little less numbing. He felt drained of all feeling after the third. But that one was also the last.

He pulled himself away from the machine and staggered forward on clumsily moving legs. He had to see how Gloria was. He saw her hanging limply against the strap. But she was alive. He could see the cloth move slowly across the shoulders as she breathed shallowly. Then the first buffeting blow struck and knocked him sprawling forward. Fortunately the first shock was a light one. He managed to strap himself in. And Forgan crashed into the compartment, bellowing:

"What the hell's the matter, Pretty-boy? Who's shooting needles at us?"

The second crashing shock knocked him against the edge of the instrument panel. His face hit with a sickening thud and Forgan rolled to the floor. Larry slipped out of his belt, ran to Forgan's side and made him fast in his own chair, then returned to his own seat. The strap held him fast, but it seemed to Larry that his insides were tearing loose as the ship spun on its axis, dove and climbed like some possessed thing. He could see through the pilot's port that they

were in the midst of a hail of solid particles, too many to count, yet each one solid as hail.

And as quickly as the strange storm struck, so quickly did it die. All this went through his mind. Now what?

HE LOOKED around and saw Gloria's eyes open, heard her ask, "Are we all right?" and saw her eyes close again. Forgan, too, was coming out of it, shaking his head back and forth, the blood dripping from his nose to spatter the walls. Then the bloodshot eyes opened wide and a snarl curled his lip.

"What the hell?" he asked weakly. "Hey! What happened?"

Larry undid his strap, stepped weakly forward and helped Forgan undo his. "I don't know, Focus," Larry said. "I just don't know. But I think we're through it. Miss Kane's out. Let's get her to her sleeping quarters."

But she was fully conscious as they stepped to her side. She shook her head when they wanted to undo the strap. "I—I'm all right," she said weakly. "Just give me a minute or so. Whew! I hope we don't have to go through that any more."

"Amen!" Forgan said.

"I don't know," Larry said. "But I think we've passed through the worst of it. H'm. That was something the meteorologists didn't warn us about." He looked abstractedly at the instrument panel. The pilot needle caught his eye. It was showing a true course without a quiver. "Gloria! Focus! Look. It's working again."

The three crowded close to the panel and watched it for a second or so. Then Larry seated himself at the panel and began to work out the formula of distance and speed. His eyes were wide in disbelief when he turned to them at last.

"We're going back to Planet Z. But not to the port the government has. To the opposite side."

"So what?" Focus asked. "So long as we get there and I can get some real shots."

"Aah!" Larry was disgusted. "You don't understand. Our path was plotted. Now we're on our own."

And again Forgan asked, "So what? Ain't you a pilot? If you ain't so let Miss Kane take over."

Gloria hid a grin under a palm. She felt like laughing but was afraid the sound would be mistaken for hysteria. Instead, she said:

"It's all right, Focus. Larry can bring us in. And I know what he means. But one thing I'm grateful for. We're definitely going to hit our goal."

LARRY BRAKED down until he was at landing speed. They were skimming the ground at some thousand feet altitude. Below, as if it was an Earth scene, green-clad hills stretched to the horizon. Here and there Larry saw open grassy ground. Then he saw a stretch large enough for a landing and called that he was coming in...

"Better use the atmosphere suits," Larry suggested. "And let's not take any chances. We'll take along the heat-pistols."

The man and woman nodded in agreement and, after dressing in the *Mulin* treated garments, Focus broke out the pistols and ten rounds of heat-energy caps. Then Larry opened the hatch and the three stepped out into broad daylight.

Gloria's voice, muffled by the head plate, came to him:

"Now isn't this silly. If there's plant life, there's the same atmosphere as on the Earth."

She was already undoing the outside

buckles. In a moment she stepped out of the suit and after another moment the two men followed her lead. Forgan was shaking his in disgust.

"Aah! Always wants to play boss," he said. "Hey, pretty-boy. Why don't you let the dame show the way?"

"Why don't you mind your own moronic business?" Larry asked in irritation.

Forgan reddened, dropped the suit to the ground and leaped forward. His left flashed in a hook to the side of Larry's jaw, and as Larry fell from the blow his right came up hard. But Larry ducked in time, though his head seemed to be spinning like a top. He could hear Gloria's horrified yelling as from a distance. But this time he and Focus were going to settle things.

He ducked a jab, another, and sent a looping left to Focus' nose. It stopped the heavier man. But Forgan only burrowed his head between his shoulders and charged forward, his fists pumping like pistons. But Larry was far the better boxer and he parried and ducked the blows with ease. Three times he chopped short punches to the side of Forgan's face and three times the other staggered. Then he rolled with the fourth and shot a counter full on the button. It knocked Larry off his feet.

There were three suns, Larry decided. Then how come there were four Forgans? And two Glorias? Something was wrong somewhere. He could hear someone asking him to "Get up. And I'll knock you all the way back to Chicago," but he couldn't understand why. He didn't want to go to Chicago. If any place, he preferred Hollywood. Or even better, New York. Why Chicago?

Then someone was pulling at his arm and he jerked it out of the someone's hold. He heard a startled sound of dismay, a feminine one, and

snapped out of his daze. Gloria was sitting on the ground, facing him. Her face was red all the way to her eyes. And those blazed in blinding anger.

"You-you stinker!" she wailed. "You struck me!"

He scrambled erect, forgetting Forgan and everything else and rushed forward and helped her to her feet. "I'm sorry," he said.

"Yeah," she groaned. "You look so different when you're sorry."

Anger gripped him again. "Then why the devil did you interfere? Why can't you just be a woman and let the men do the men's work? But no! You've got to show your femininity. So you get hurt! Serves you right."

HER FACE drained of color at his biting words. She rose and, smiling, strode toward him. It was an enigmatic smile, and he was curious as to its meaning. His reflex block of the sudden slap she gave him was a bit slow. His face burned at the mark her five fingers left on it. But his smile matched hers.

"Not for your words," she said. "But for your ego. Perhaps it won't be so great, now?"

"Not him, Miss Kane!" a voice belled. "He's the greatest flyer, the greatest lover, the greatest guy in the whole world. This or any other world."

They turned at the unexpected sound and saw Focus Forgan, hands on hips, head thrown back, laughing uproariously.

But the girl did not find either the man or his words amusing. She strode toward him and he retreated at the look on her face, his own reflecting dismay. "Now, Miss Kane," he cautioned. "I didn't mean anything...."

She was intent on what she was doing. Forgan had his back to the ap-

proaching creatures, so only Larry Lipton saw them. They were still some way off. But his keen sight had seen them in the distance.

"Gloria, Focus!" he called in warning. "Down! Quick!"

They obeyed on the instant, the urgency in his tone a command they knew better than to disobey. The grass was high and covered them completely. Larry crawled forward, calling as he did, "Get your guns out."

Forgan and the girl were close together when Larry reached them. "I don't know whether they saw us or not," Larry said in a whisper. "But I'm sure they're not the people from the government station."

"How far off were they?" Gloria asked.

"About a quarter mile."

"So what's all this for?" Focus asked. "Maybe they're friends?" What the heck! We got the power right here...." he patted his heat-pistol. "...If they get smart so we bump them."

There was something in what Forgan said, Larry thought. Yet he had the strangest feeling that the strangers were not friends, that they held a definite threat for the three from Earth. "Well. Maybe you're right, Focus. But it won't hurt to just wait here and see what they look like. If they look like they're friendly *then* we can show ourselves. How do you feel about it Gloria?"

I feel like an idiot, she thought. "I've always hated discretion," she said. "But in this case...." She had hated to say what she did, but Larry had forced her into a corner. Her real feelings matched Forgan's. If they weren't friendly, why the heat-pistols would even the odds. But an instant's reflection made Larry's plan the better. Maybe they had weapons equal to the Earth people's? If so.... She

became grim at the thought. Their position then was not an enviable one.

The three peered over the knee-high grass toward the large group of beings approaching, with mixed feelings.

THERE WAS something not quite human about those people, Larry decided. Yet he could not figure out why. They walked erect, and even at the distance which separated them, he could make out that they had but two legs and arms and but one head. They were not comic-strip characters. He was sure of that! Until they were some hundred yards removed. Then he changed his mind.

The human beings he knew had no wings sprouting from their shoulder blades.

His companions saw what he did at the same time.

"Jeez!" Forgan grunted. "I didn't know Heaven was like this."

"Don't be funny," the girl said, her eyes intent on the approaching strangers. "But other than their having wings, they look all right to me."

"Think we ought to risk it?" Larry asked.

"Yes! But let's be careful and keep our fingers close to the trigger pull."

They were about to suit the action to the words when something happened which changed their minds. They had forgotten about the space sphere. It was lying out there in the meadow, an immense sphere of gleaming Solminum. It proved to be the goal.

Larry hadn't been sure the things attached to these beings' shoulders were wings. He was certain in a very short while. The whole group suddenly took wing, like a group of fabulously large geese, and flew straight up until they were quite a distance above the sphere. Then, much like the old-time planes the air force used, they peeled off, one by one, and dived

straight down at the sphere.

The huge wings beat too swiftly for the eye to follow, and their speed was so low it didn't seem possible they would miss. Larry counted them as they came in. Sixty two. He watched them as they flew to one side, then gasped audibly as they rose straight up again and dove once more. His gasp was echoed by the others, as they watched. For this time there was a difference. They could not see what the birdmen did; their movements were too fast, but they could see the results. Tiny puffs of smoke touched the sphere as each passed. The whole ship seemed to be shrouded in the smoke. Then, as if from internal combustion, the sphere burst into flames.

It was impossible! Larry knew it. It just couldn't be. The thing was constructed of Solminum. Heat-resistant to such an extent it could withstand the tremendous heat of outer space, yet whatever means these bird-like creatures used generated an energy beyond the power of human conception.

It was over quickly. Not even ashes to mark the grave of the space sphere. . . .

Larry rose, shoulders drooping. The girl and Forgan followed his example. And for once the irrepressible Forgan had nothing to say. Gloria spoke for all, her voice low, filled with horror:

"They're monsters! How could they know if there was anyone in the ship?"

"They didn't," Larry said. "So they took no chances. It's just common sense to destroy what you don't trust."

Forgan voiced the question lying at the bottom of their hearts; "So that's over. But what about us? What do we do now? No radio, no tele-cast camera, no way of letting the home folks know what's happened. Anybody got an answer?"

"Not at the moment," Larry said. He knew, however, that inaction would cripple them, let the seeds of fear eat at them, would soon make them fly at each other's throats and in the end force them into actions over which they could have no control. "But this I do know," he went on. "That we just can't stay here."

"Suppose we sit down and sort of map a near future for us?"

FORGAN LOOKED at the girl, his beetle brows furrowed in thought, and Gloria looked at him. They nodded simultaneously and turned to Larry, who was already falling to the ground.

"Okay, Lipton," Forgan said. "Let's hear your angle. Then maybe Miss Kane'll have something to add, and maybe even me. Shoot!"

"Well, first, I think that there isn't any more government station. These bird-people have control of it now. But the installations might be there. That's for one. For another, and what may prove to be our best bet, these beings have exhibited a knowledge which shows they're thinking beings. So they must have cities, places of habitation. I say best bet because we might find them friendly if we show that they have nothing to fear from us.

"But there is one thing which puzzles me. This is supposed to be a dark planet. Yet if we look above there is definitely light, though from what source puzzles me because there is no sun. Now, if you remember our orientation, we were told that the whole planet was dark, though not cold, because we were not told to take clothes other than the ones we wore. So I must come to this conclusion. That we did not reach our goal after all."

"I don't get it, buster," Forgan said. "First you say we did then you

say we didn't. And don't give me the old double-talk. Because only a couple of seconds ago you said you didn't think the government station was there any more. Right?"

"Forgan's right, Larry," Gloria said. "I'm curious also."

"It's rather simple," Larry explained smilingly. "If you remember, we were on a constant beam with the station. But we never got in contact. We were told we wouldn't until we reached the limits of their wave length. But even when we were in that limit we received no signals. Therefore, to bring my dialectic discussion to a summary and logical conclusion, the station is no longer in operation. And, to add two and two together, since this planet is obviously not dark, we never landed on the one we aimed for, altogether."

"Y'know," Forgan said, admiration in his voice despite him, "the boy's right. It all makes sense."

"Except for one thing," Gloria pointed out. "What has this place to do with the other, although Mister Lipton thinks that the two are related?"

"Because our instruments *were* working just before we landed. And they pointed to the fact we had reached our goal. Positively! It's my idea that this thing is a sort of satellite of the dark planets. And, for some reason, has never been reported. Unless—"

"Unless what?" Gloria leaned forward, her vivid eyes wide, and her lovely face alight with interest.

"—Unless," Larry continued, "our boys never sent any of the messages back to Earth at all."

Forgan grunted. "You're nuts, guy!" he exploded. "How could that be?"

"Simple. If they were smart enough to invent a weapon they were able to

carry, yet one which made nothing of something as large as the space ship, then they could quite easily have taken over the installations and no one would be the wiser."

"And Larry's right," Gloria said.

"So he's right," Forgan said. "And now what do we do?"

"Anything but just sit here. For one thing, what about food? And for another, since there isn't any sun, there won't be night. Which brings up the business of sleep," Gloria said. "Although it really has no bearing on anything, I realize."

"Well, there was one important thing you mentioned," Larry said. "Food. So just let's get up and go. It doesn't make any difference which way. One will do as well as the next."

LARRY TOOK the lead, and Forgan brought up the rear. The light, mysterious though pleasant, was strange since there were no shadows. There were no trees though there were some fairly tall hedge-like bushes. There seemed a complete absence of animal life. The countryside was rolling and hilly and time meant nothing since the light was constant, and as they walked, they talked, though they kept a constant watch for the bird-like creatures.

Several hours must have passed before Gloria voiced a hunger plaint.

"I got a piece of gum, Miss Kane. Ain't much but maybe it'll help," Forgan said.

She took it, grateful for the small bit of satisfaction it would give.

Larry had seen that the hedges had grown thicker, more frequent as they walked along. More, as time went by he became aware of something which he had noticed from the beginning, but to which he had paid small attention. There were an immense number of birds, though all seemed voiceless. And

these birds seemed to be following them in their march. It was strange to see these vari-colored flyers, small and large, skimming the hedges and returning to sometimes fly just above their heads, each lovely to see and each voiceless.

They came at last to an impasse. The hedges stretched in a long straight line before them, an impenetrable wall of brush. Larry scratched at his head, wondering what to do. They had very little choice. It was either through the hedges or follow the curving line. He looked at Forgan and the cameraman could only shrug. As for Gloria, she was beginning to feel tiredness now as well as hunger.

"Think you can manage, Gloria?" Larry asked, gesturing toward the hedges.

"I suppose," the girl said wearily. "Maybe we'll find something on the other side."

"Yeah," Forgan supplemented. "I'm getting kinda tired of this scenery."

Larry turned his head to see if he could spot a path which might lead through but though he could see light there was no definition which showed a pattern. Gotta risk it, he thought. He sent a silent prayer skyward as he started forward, hoping that it would find the right ear.

The branches bent with his body and he felt a thankfulness it was not a thorn hedge. The branches were rubbery rather than stiff. They broke through with a suddenness which startled. And what Larry saw made him fall swiftly on his face. The trouble was the others were close behind, and not so swift in their reflexes.

"Damn!" Larry muttered as he rose and stepped in front of the girl. "Now we're in for it."

THEY HAD come on a roadway, wide, smooth and well-traveled.

Or at least for the moment. A long line of two-wheeled vehicles was passing. These affairs were about twenty feet long, and shaped somewhat like a shallow boat. Seated in each were perhaps fifty of the bird men. They were dressed in flesh-colored coveralls. Their heads were bare and well-shaped. At their waists a tube-like gadget hung suspended from a belt. All this Larry saw before one of the birdmen spotted them as the two-wheeler passed them. As he turned and called attention to them to his companions, Larry rose and stepped in front of the girl.

"First guy makes a wrong move I'm blasting!" Forgan said in an aside.

"Better not. Make sure first," Larry cautioned.

But it was Gloria who gave the most sensible advice: "Better put those pistols back," she said. "And let's just put our hands up in the air. They may not know what it means, but they can't mistake it for truculence."

The long line of vehicles had stopped, as if some strange and silent signal had been given. And as some of the birdmen leaped from their positions, others spread their wings and flew toward the three at the side of the road, to hover above them with a great flapping of wings.

Now the three Earth people had a close look at the bird people. They looked human in every way, other than the wings, which seemed to grow from the shoulderblades. At least the appearance was thus, the coveralls hiding the joint. A slit had been made in the garment, permitting the feathered wing complete freedom.

"What do you do here?" the first to reach them asked in low, well-modulated tones.

"Why, they speak English," Gloria

said, her voice shrill with surprise.

The man smiled and they saw his teeth were white and even. "We speak the Universal tongue," he said. "But my question needs answering."

"We flew here in the sphere you people burned," Larry said.

They were completely surrounded now. They could feel the curiosity of these bird people, feel it in the studied glances and low whispers which reached their ears.

"Oh-h. I see. Well, come along then..."

He turned and marched back to the vehicle without a second glance to see whether they were following or not. But Larry noticed that the ones in the air did not fly back, but kept up the hovering directly over their heads.

"Shall we go, kiddies?" Forgan asked, his mouth twisted in a crooked grin.

"Guess the choice isn't ours," Gloria said as she took the lead.

Room was made for them in the vehicle of the one who had questioned them and the lone line started off again. The pace was rather leisurely but now there were some from every two-wheeler who flew above as if in escort. Pretty smart, Larry thought to himself. Maybe they figure there are more of us. I just wish there were. Quite suddenly he felt, as if it were a physical thing, the burning stare of someone behind him.

"It would do no good," a voice whispered.

"What wouldn't?" Larry asked.

Forgan and the girl turned toward him, their eyes wide in silent questioning.

"Your having allies," the birdman said. He smiled pleasantly and Larry really noticed that the man's face was even-featured, with nicely proportioned nose, mouth and eyes. The hands were large though well shaped, and the fin-

gers showed sensitivity in their length.

"So you read my mind?" Larry asked.

"A not too difficult thing," the other answered. "You will learn to control your thinking better."

"By the way," Larry asked. "Where are we going?"

"To Koba," the other replied. "The city of our people. It will not be long."

SO THEY have cities, Larry thought.

And stopped thinking. Perhaps it were better not to think. He turned away and looked over the rail against which he leaned. He noticed that the birdmen overhead were no longer there. They had come in to their respective cars.

"Larry." Gloria's voice, muted in amazement, called him out of his reverie. Look!"

He turned in the direction of her gaze and whistled under his breath. The spires of hundreds of buildings showed low on the horizon. His distance-trained eyes told him that those spires must reach thousands of feet into the air. As if the sight of the city of Koba made itself felt in a strange fashion the cavalcade of two-wheelers speeded up their pace. They seemed to skim the surface of the road.

"Whew!" Forgan whistled. "These things can really travel. Man! We must be going a hundred miles an hour."

But Larry had eyes only for the city, coming closer by the second. He could see spider-webs of girders connecting the buildings. Then, as they reached a point where the perspective showed them in all their majesty, he realized their immensity. There were thousands of them. And now they came to parallel roads, and cross roads. Traffic lights blossomed overhead.

There were all sorts of vehicles to be seen, all travelling at a terrific clip. But the large two-wheelers had the right-of-way.

Then they were on a sort of bridge, a bridge which had no supports. Built on thin air. Larry wondered how it held their weight. He turned to see whether the birdman would answer his unspoken question but the other seemed lost in thoughts of his own. Ruefully, Larry wished he had the faculty of reading minds. Many questions would surely have been answered.

Now they were definitely off the ground. And their speed increased, the closer they got to Koba. They were going so fast everything was a blur. And then they were among the buildings. Suddenly the light was no longer there. Darkness closed in on them. Gloria stifled a scream. Larry put his arm about her instinctively in a protective gesture. And she snuggled in its strength.

"Do not fear," a voice said comfortingly. "We are but approaching our goal. Soon we will be there."

They braked to a stop which brought a murmur of admiration from Forgan. At the speed they had been going he had been wondering how far they'd have to travel before coming to a stop. A matter of seconds. And the wonder of it was that they did not slam forward as he had thought they would.

"Follow us, please," said the birdman who had first spoken to them. He seemed to be a leader of sorts, though there was nothing in either his dress or manner which differentiated him from the others.

A soft, mellow glow enveloped them. They were in an immense hall, the walls of which shed this light. The entire crew, other than the man who was leading them, stepped into an open

elevator which was at the landing. Gloria and her companions followed in the footsteps of the birdman. They walked for a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile along the immense corridor. Now and then other corridors bisected theirs. But they seemed the only ones abroad.

FINALLY they reached another elevator, one in a bank of three. The others were also open, as if waiting the arrival of passengers. The four stepped within the huge cage, built to hold hundreds of people, and without warning the thing started upward. Larry couldn't understand how it worked; no one was at the controls. For one thing there were no controls, and for another, there was the faintest sound of machinery at work. Other than the first sound there were no further ones. And in a second or two the huge doors slid open and they stepped out.

"No-o!" Forgan said aloud.

Larry and the girl understood exactly what he meant.

They were in a sort of bird cage. It was the only way to describe it. But the thing was hundreds of feet high, and fully two hundred feet across. There were great swinging bars on which were perched *millions* of birds, little ones. The sound of their trilling was deafening in this closed space.

"Silence, oh birds of Koba," their guide shouted. "I bring you people of another world."

The sudden silence which followed his shout was terrifying. Larry felt his hair prickle and felt Gloria suddenly press close to him. His throat was suddenly dry and from the corner of his eye he saw Forgan go pale. Yet there was no reason he could lay hands to why he felt this terror.

A single bird fluttered close on slowly moving wings. Closer and closer

it came until it passed before them in slow revue. Larry wanted to close his eyes, to look aside, to see anything other than what he was seeing. The tiny bird, maybe five inches from the tip of its beak to the furthest tail feather, had the face of a man. An old face, an evil face, a face which held all the marks of evil incarnate.

"What kind of a hell is this?" Forgan's hoarse whisper reached Larry as from a distance.

But Larry had eyes and ears only for the bird which was flying back before them again.

"Fine! Fine," came a tiny piping voice from the throat of the bird. "Very good, Savor. I like these. Where are they from?"

"Answer!" Savor shouted at them.

Larry swallowed the cottony saliva and said: "From a planet called Earth."

"Aie! Earth, eh? Yes, ye-es. Heard of it. Ninth cycle planet Hmm! We have come a long way. But the Venusians told us that it was on Earth we would find the nesting grounds we have been seeking for all these millennia. So then.

"I see the sexes are mixed. Good. Propagation is a means for our ends also. Now then. How did you arrive on this space island? As the others did from the dark planet? In the same kind of space vehicle?"

Larry remained silent. A child's laugh came from the throat of the bird fluttering on swiftly moving wings before him.

"Emotionally disturbed, isn't he? To be expected, Savor. Take him and the others to the room of memory. And let me know what you learn."

"Shall I bust this goon one?" Forgan asked as Savor held the doors to the huge bird cage open. There was a strange smile on the man's face, a

smile which seemed to invite violence. Larry interpreted it correctly, and decided he would be the one to test it, not Forgan.

"Nope! Not yet, anyway," Larry said aloud, and deliberately smiled into the other's eyes. Forgan worried his brow about the grin, but held his peace.

SAVOR FOLLOWED them out, then stepped briskly to the fore. His steps and the other's echoed hollowly on the marble flagstones. Not a person was to be seen as they walked the interminable length of the corridor. And when they arrived at their goal it was with the same unexpectedness as when they came to the gigantic bird cage.

They finally came to the end of the corridor, and there, at the very turn, was an immense nail-studded door. Savor simply stood before it and it opened wide to him. The three earth people could only stare open-mouthed at what was before them. Fully a hundred men were busily engaged in some sort of work in the large room. One of them, a tall lean man, with a saturnine look about the eyes and mouth, came forward. Larry was quick to note that this man was wingless.

"Aah! Savor, the warrior. What brings you now?"

"These," Savor said severely. It was apparent he and the other shared the same opinions about each other. Larry filed away their mutual dislike for future reference. "Earth people," Savor continued. "The same miserable creatures we found on the dark planet."

"Not too miserable," the man in the smock said. "Fact of the matter was there were one or two who were highly intelligent. Too bad the military wanted them. But, we must remember our mission, mustn't we?"

Savor's face went crimson. His lips thinned into a bloodless line. Angry words were on the tip of his tongue, but he drew them back.

"It would be well to bear it in mind. That and nothing else. But I have no time for idle talk. The bird-man wants these placed in the memory machine and their reactions recorded. I must report back."

"But of course," the other said, then pursed his lips. "The *bird-man* wants their memory reactions. Very well. Find a seat somewhere, and be careful where. We're working at something very deadly. The smallest drop would kill—"

Savor's face blanched. "Ah, no, thank you. I'll stand."

"As you wish," the other said. "And now, good people, will you follow me..."

He led them into another, smaller room, one which held a single complicated piece of machinery. A seat was at one, before which was the same sort of apparatus an optometrist uses to peer into patients' eyes.

"The lady first, if you don't mind?" the saturnine-faced man said.

"Not at all," Larry said. Forgan merely grunted.

"Thank you. Now let me place this eyepiece at the proper level—so—now! Just look at the cross piece for a moment.... Savor is such a bore. It is no longer fun to bait him, even. Now you look like a person of intelligence. Tell me—by the way, I am Corono, a scientist. And you..." his hand indicated the three of them.

Larry introduced them. Corono shook his head at each name. "As I was about to say, what makes people of intelligence seek the unknown? Surely nothing but trouble is their reward, a fleeting fame, until another finds another mysterious something. But always the adventurous come

rushing out to promote another bed-lam. Hah! Sometimes I am sorry that the cold analytical science is my calling. But in the world of which I am a molecule, one has no choice, science or war-school. There are no others. A pity. The people of your planet who were with us for such a short time, told me a great deal of this planet you inhabit, the Earth. There were many pleasant things I heard of for the first time. A something called baseball. And another called, a burlesque show? Am I correct?"

"All the way, pal," Forgan was the one who answered. "All the way."

"**S**TRANGE," Corono said musingly. "There was one among them who also called me pal. Yes. I am going to find many things of interest on Earth...."

"You mean you people are going to *invade* the Earth?" Larry asked.

"Dear me!" Corono said, making sucking sounds with his lips. "I let the secret out. I shouldn't have, really. Excuse me, but Miss Kane has had her memory taken. And now, Mister Forgan.... Fine," he went on after checking the instrument for Forgan. "I believe it is a military secret. But I *hate* secrets. I like things out in the open, friendship and enmity. Yes, your planet will be invaded. We are now in communication with the people of Venus. In fact we are expecting a number of their leaders, a sort of war council, shortly. Shouldn't wonder if no harm will come to you until the Venusians have had a chance to talk to you and the others.

"Besides, Miss Kane is the first of the opposite sex the bird-man has ever seen. She might prove of amusement to him."

"Why is the name bird-man used in the singular?" Larry asked. "There must have been a million birds in that

huge aviary—at least that many."

"I thought you looked intelligent," Corono said. "But it will have to wait for a short while. Mister Forgan is through. You're next, Larry...."

Larry looked at Forgan as he stepped away from the machine and noticed that there was an odd blankness about his eyes, but did not think too much of it. Then he was seated in the same chair as the others had used and Corono was making the proper adjustments for him. Corono's voice came as from a distance, "Focus your eyes on the cross piece...."

Larry did as the other ordered. The hairs of the cross piece showed bright and clear against the ground glass. He looked at them as the other had told him to. Suddenly they were no longer there. Instead, a young boy and a dog walked into his vision. They were so real, so close, Larry felt he could have reached out and touched them. His lips framed the word, "Tex," but no sound came forth. He remembered exactly where Tex and he were going. To the stream on Mister Brown's place. The boy and dog faded from view. Another scene; it was a football field. A man was running with the ball. The man was without helmet, and he ran with a wondrous swaying movement of hips and body. Time after time someone attempted to stop him, but always the young man evaded the wild rushes, and outflung arms. There was a wild roaring sound, "Lipton! Run, Larry!" Then another figure came into view. That one was running parallel to the man who was carrying the football cuddled in one arm. It was Forgan, a younger, not so beat-up Forgan. Suddenly there was a someone directly in front of the ball carrier, a someone who would refuse to be drawn to either side by the swaying hips and twisting body, a someone who had

never missed a tackle in all his football career. The ball carrier and tackler neared to where they were going to meet head-on. And from out of the nowhere another figure catapulted into the would-be tackler and knocked him out of the play. . . . "Good old Focus," Larry whispered. And another scene: A long line of battle wagons. Bursts of fire broke the surface of Venus and the night was filled with roaring sounds. Then the battle wagons broke into flaming hells, and after a while the firing ceased on Venus. Below, fifty thousand feet above the cloud-filled planet, a thousand fighter ships fought singly and in groups. There was one, a single-manned ship, which broke from a dog fight and chased a Venusian ship on whose side was painted the insignia of a flight commander. The two little ships spun and whirled through the screaming night until a tiny burst of green flame from the other fighter touched the side of the Venusian craft. It burst apart with a single spectacular show of flame. The man in the Earth ship grinned crookedly, and sought another victim. . . . And the cross hairs came into view again.

"All right, Larry," Corono's voice came to him as from a distance and Larry stepped away from the machine.

He had trouble focusing properly for a few moments. Then he felt the touch of Corono's fingers and he snapped out of the daze he was in.

"All done, Earthman," Corono said. "Now we must return. Let me give you a word of warning. Do not attempt to cross the bird-man. It will not go well with you."

ONCE MORE they were in the huge aviary. Savor stood rigidly at attention as he related what the memory machine had given. The bird-man flew back and forth, back and

forth, before them as Savor talked.

"Very well, Savor, You may stay without," the bird-man said. "I will call you when we have done talking."

Savor saluted and closed the huge doors behind him.

"Now I understand more clearly why the Venusians want to come to my side," the bird-man said. "They lost the war against the Earth. But they are an arrogant race, the little I have seen of them. Also a treacherous race."

"Tell me, Earthman. What do you think of my chances of having the Earth submit to me without battle?"

"Not a chance in a million," Larry said.

"I thought as much. A pity. There will be a veritable famine of living beings when I have done. I would rather not. After all, I seek only sanctuary for my people. But as is always the way, this seeking, the reasons for it, can be misconstrued. So death is done, in wholesale lots, of course. Tell me, Earthman. Do I ask too much?"

"I don't know what else you want, bird-man," Larry said boldly. "There may be hidden things, things you haven't spoken of."

The childish laughter climbed the scale until it approached the sound the mad give off. "Oh, Earthman!" the bird-voice gasped. "I like you! Very much. You, at least, have intelligence. We are people who place a high value on cerebation. But we are a dying race. A race which needs must plant trees that they shall bear fruit. There is but one sex on that dead place from which we have come. The millions of years of evolution forced us in a direction which finally eliminated the other sex. So the Earth will be the fruit-bearing orchard in which I shall plant the seeds."

"Y'know what I think," Forgaa

said suddenly breaking in on them. "I think both of you are nuts. What goes with this deal? We're standing around shooting off our mouths to a sparrow. Why...." He suddenly reached out and grasped the bird. "Gotcha! One squeeze, you filthy thing, and...."

Suddenly Forgan stiffened. The bird-man was still clasped in the huge fingers, but laxly now. Larry had the feeling the bird could have escaped had it wanted to. But his eyes were on Forgan. He heard Gloria moan in sudden terror, and he himself felt an urge to scream. Forgan's mouth had begun to twitch, his eyes rolled, and a vibration seemed to possess the entire figure of the man. Saliva drooled from the corner of the mouth. Then the hand holding the bird-man fell limply to the side and Forgan began an odd shuffle which ended in a hopping on first one leg, then another. The arms lifted and began to flap, as if he were imitating a bird's movement before taking off.

LARRY BIT his lip until it bled. He whirled and grabbed Gloria to him, holding her head against his chest, so that she would not have to look at the horror which was taking place before them.

For Forgan was undergoing a horrible transformation. His body was shrinking, changing. The head also was shrinking. But where the rest of the *thing* had become a bird, emerging from the garments of a man, the head had merely shrunk to a horrible miniature of itself. The mouth opened and a wild chirping came forth. Then the wings flapped and the bird which had once been Focus Forgan fluttered off on unsure wings to join the millions of others.

And the childish laughter of the bird-man rose until Larry wanted to hold his ears to shut out the mad

sound. He didn't know how long he could have taken it. Gloria's faint pulled him back to reality and reason.

"Oh, don't worry about your friend," the bird-man said. "He will be quite content in my aviary. They all are. And when the time comes he will be released. I dislike violence, especially when it is attempted against me. Bear it in mind, Earthman. As I said before, I like you, Earthman. And the woman, also. Do not try foolish bravado, and we will get along well. Perhaps I may even take you to Venus and let you see how a planet is conquered. I—" a strange look passed over the face of the man-bird, like a cloud presaging the first of those bringing a storm. "—I think the time has come for your departure. Corono will be your guardian. He wants it, the scientific fool. Savor!"

The warrior came in and received instructions to bring the two to Corono. And once more the great doors closed behind them. Gloria was sobbing without restraint, as they followed Savor down the now-familiar corridor.

LARRY STRODE up and down the width of the room. Corono was seated at a long couch, eating abstractedly at some fruit. Now and then Larry paused and looked out of the opening which showed the hundreds of other immense sky scrapers in the immediate vicinity. Gloria, whom Corono had given a powder which he said would ease her mind and let her sleep, was lying in another room adjoining the one the two men were in. It was Corono's private apartment.

"Exercise of this nature leads to frustration," the scientist observed. "There is so little which you can do, you know."

"But you say, 'little,'" Larry said, stopping his wild pacing. "Which means there is a chance of doing something."

"The meaning of a word, a semantic science," Corono observed. "The way of hope. To seize on the straw and imagine it the log. Nature can suddenly erupt as it has sometimes done, for no reason we have ever been able to figure, and we will all die in the cataclysm. Of course there is hope. But hope only of Death, the final escape."

"This *thing*," Larry grunted. "This bird-man, knows that you are against him and what he is planning. He thinks you are a fool."

Corono smiled. "It is that fact alone which might have a later meaning for us," he said. "The actions of a fool are hard to predict, simply because a fool does not work from a cerebrated pattern."

"You like that word, don't you?" Larry asked.

"I like all words. And sometimes use them in different ways. They are simply a means of communication. We use different ones for different people. The point is that we must communicate by means of the word. One way or another. Our success in having understanding can only be measured by the degree to which we have transmitted the words which can be understood."

"But the tiny beast in his large cage isn't interested in words. Deeds are his forte. Vile, vicious deeds," Larry observed.

"By the way," Corono said. "He is called, Gundar, the King. . . . Oh, I don't say that Gundar and the military are not thinking people. I only say their pattern is not ours. For the present we are being used to make the pattern complete. I am sure Gundar will give us the same release he

has given millions, and I and my friends will wind up flying about the bars of his aviary, also."

"What is this horrible power he has?" Larry asked.

For the first time the saturnine expression changed to one of deep concern and something of sadness. "I—I don't know," Corono admitted. "I don't know. Each King is given the *power*, as it is called. How it is given, how it works, is something which is a mystery to all. Aah! If only we knew! How much smoother the path would be. It is a terrible thing indeed. I have lost many friends to that power. And it is impossible to say when he will use it, when the whim will seize him."

Larry found a chair close to the couch and sat, one arm thrown over the back, his profile to Corono. "I wonder what the people back in the states are thinking?" he said. "Tom Flynn and the others. The audience which sat up to take in the tele-cast we were supposed to do? I wonder if they have sent out search ships for us? Hah! I wonder a lot of things. Any answers to some of them, scientist?"

"Only that patience finds its own reward," the other observed. "I can tell you this. The Venusian delegation have arrived. So it shan't be long, now."

"By the way, Corono," Larry suddenly asked, turning toward the other. "How come you don't have wings as Savor and his men do?"

Corono smiled. "A matter of demand. They must use those wings. We never have reason to."

"No. No, I mean are they real?" Larry persisted.

"They are as artificial as the men using them," the other said. "Some day you will see. And like a scientist without his instruments, so is the war-

rior without his wings. Emptiness personified."

There was an interval of silence, an interval broken by Larry's windy sigh, and his words, "Well. I hate this doing nothing. I hope the delegation brings action."

"It will," Corono promised.

HE WAS RIGHT. Since there was no means of measuring time, except by watching his watch, which was simply a waste of time, Larry had no means of knowing how long they had been in Corono's custody, before the summons came to appear before Gundar. Their stay had not been unpleasant. Food of different variety had been given them, a certain amount of freedom was theirs, and after a time he and Gloria had become somewhat accustomed to the day without end.

He had learned that the city had been constructed in an amazingly short time, and that Gundar had it in his power to construct like cities all over the Earth if he so desired. Larry also learned that the scientists of the Earth were fledglings in their knowledge alongside of Corono and his men. He had also learned Corono was the scientist supreme in all of the land, which held three other cities beside Koba.

These bits of knowledge he had gained did not sit well on his mind. Fear was a perpetual bird, sitting on his shoulder. A bird named Gundar.

He had done his best not to communicate this fear to Gloria. But she was not the sort of person to hide things from. For one thing she was too intelligent not to reason these things out for herself. And for another, she was too self-sufficient, too much a person of integrity to withhold the facts of the case. There had

come a time when Larry had to tell her what he had learned from Corono and what their chances of escape were.

"Well," she had said. "If there is even the smallest chance we must not give up hope. In the meantime, we must try to figure out a means of getting back to Earth, so that should the chance present itself we would be prepared."

Then came the summons. And once more Savor appeared before them. There was a look of triumph on the warrior's face. And for once Corono had no wit to throw off at the other. It was all-too apparent that Savor and his warriors were to see action. But for the first time he did not act with the complete disregard of the Earth people as he had before. It did not mean that he himself had changed. But the fact that Gundar had allowed them to live was warrant enough that they must be treated as humans. At least of Koba's status.

There were some fifty of the Venusians, huge men, most of them well over seven feet in height, their skins a slate grey, their eyes yellow as a jungle cat's. They wore the trappings of the warrior caste, and the belts which held their energy pistols were studded with precious stones. It was the outward sign of their overweening vanity, that and their nose-high disdain of anything which could not battle. Fighting was their life and to it they dedicated their living.

As usual Gundar flew back and forth among them, and between them. It was hard to say whether they feared the bird-man or not. But that they held him in respect was easily to be seen. At sight of the two Earth people Gundar flew to meet them. He hovered at eye level and called their names as if in introduction. There

were several names familiar to Larry, names well-known in inter-planetary circles.

ONE, SAX-O, was well-known for his space travels. Another, Gin-Per, had invented a gravity-deflector which proved invaluable when meeting the huge asteroids of space. But the one which elicited the most surprise was Hag-U, the commander-in-chief of all the forces which had been defeated in the war between the Earth and Venus.

Larry wondered how he got here. He had been banished forever, to spend the last of his days on one of the satellites of Saturn.

"If you are worried for your friend," Gundar said, "do not feel too concerned. He is quite content."

It was strange, Larry thought, that just the slightest thought of Forgan had come to his mind, a thought which had been brought up only as they entered the huge aviary and he had looked up at the bars holding the myriad birds. But it brought back to mind what the friendly soldier had once told him. About the reading of minds.

"I hope so," Larry said. "He is a friend, and I do worry."

The evil face, tiny as a miniature, grinned at the answer. "Always from the emotional standpoint, eh, Earthman. Cold reason serves us better. Much better. No interference. But the council is ready. There are seats, my friends...."

For a moment after they were seated there was the hoarse sound of many voices in low talk. Then Gundar flew to a bar suspended just a few feet above the floor level. He perched upon it and swayed gently to and fro, the while he surveyed his audience.

"My friends," he began. "I have

called us together because the time has come for, on the one hand, vengeance, and on the other, sanctuary. I speak for all of the dead planet of Cycle Three. And you are the representatives of the planet, Venus.

"I have also asked two people who are here visiting, as it were, from the planet, Earth, to attend. Since it is their planet which will be the scene of our conquest, it is only proper they should know of and about it, and the means to be used in its accomplishment."

Laughter roared out at the words. And it was instantly noticeable that the Venusians became more at ease. This creature, this bird-man, was to their liking. For after all, weren't they the cruelest people in the Universe?

Gunder went on. "We have struck a pact, my people and the people of Venus. In return for our scientific knowledge and machines, we will have the planet Venus for our sanctuary, the while the people of Venus take Earth."

Loud cheers roared out at the words.

Larry was aghast. So that was their diabolic scheme. What a horror was to be loosed on the Earth!

"So was the pact made and will be kept," Gundar went on. "My warriors are few and those of Venus many. Enough so that they will overrun Earth."

"And now I tell you that it will soon take place. Very soon. My scientists have told me all is in readiness. The vessels which we used in our migration to this place are ready for the larger travel, the more dangerous journey. But first the way must be made safe. I am prepared to send the machines and science weapons. Are you ready to use them?"

A concerted roar of "Ayes" rose up

to greet the bird-man's shouted question.

"Good! Then within a very short time we will go to work. Now I am tired and must ask you to leave me. There are quarters prepared for your comfort for the time you will be here. The moment of departure will be made known to you...."

Larry arose with the Venusians, and Gloria started to follow suit. But both paused as Gundar said:

"Hold, Earthmen! I would speak with you."

HE WAITED until the last of the Venusians departed before speaking again:

"You will return to Corono's apartment. I have decided that since you have found favor in his eyes, you will both travel in his private space ship. It will be a vantage point for you to watch the spectacle of the destruction of the cities of Earth.

"As for your friend, who is in my aviary somewhere, he also will be with you. In a cage, of course. Do not despair! It is entirely within the bounds of reason that I will find use for both of you. The woman intrigues me. I have never before met anyone of her sex. Yes. I think I will find use for you. When next we meet it will be on Earth...."

Corono's smile of welcome was heartfelt, and Larry felt that it was like seeing a dear friend after a long and frightening journey. Both men clothed their real feelings in their own fashion.

Corono said, as they stepped into the now-familiar apartment: "No wings? I am surprised! Gundar loves to make his power felt. And it is easy to displease him. I heard of a man who once breathed too heavily. Gundar thought the proper cure for that was to make him a winged creature."

Gloria had pleaded a headache and

had gone immediately into the room she had occupied. Larry was alone with the scientist. He grinned broadly at the other and replied:

"A sort of asthmatic bird, eh?" he turned serious. "It won't be long, now, Corono. This, from Gundar's crooked, evil mouth. The Venusians almost broke the doors down with their noise. They *are* a noisy race. And their wars are conducted loudly also. It's as if they have fear in their souls and without sound to reassure them they are lost. We learned that in the war and capitalized on it. All our attacks were made in the utmost secrecy and with the most astonishing quiet.

"You told me that you have created machines the like of which have never been seen or thought of. I can well believe it, having lived here in Koba. We have cities which are similar. But only to the casual eye. Just a few items. 'The flying bridges', a thousand feet high, thin as a spider's cobweb, strong as the strongest Solminum. And these glassless windows. I don't quite understand them. Nothing lies between us and the air out there. Yet if I try to put my hand out beyond the frame I find it impossible.

"But we also are clever. I am sure it will be a long and costly affair."

"My friend," Corono began on a note of sadness. "And I do consider you a friend. For surely I have learned to love and respect you, as man does a friend. My friend, let me make several things clear to you, that you do not lift your hopes too high. Gundar is evil incarnate. We are not possessed of morals, nor do we have concepts of right and wrong, such as, for example, you have. Our's has been a far more complex way of life than yours. So, early, we learned in our evolution that the fewer the interferences from the hazards of these

things, the better are our lives. They were tossed aside as having no value. Because we are neuters, sexless, we have no love, as you know it. Emotion is something strange to us. Neither love nor hate. We have, in fact, become neuters in the strict sense of the word.

"But this I say, as a man and a scientist. It is wrong! In my heart I have always said it. Now the words are spoken. But I am a small part of my world and, truth to tell, a very unimportant part. Gundar uses me as he does the seeds with which he is fed. When he has taken the kernel from it he spits it out. So will I be rejected when the times comes."

"Look!" Larry said after a while. Corono had fallen into a dark and introspective silence. "I'd never asked before it never occurred to me. Now I'd like to know. What is Gundar? How was he made? What is this terrible power he has over all of you? Why do you all fear him? And why does he stay in that monstrous cage, closed in with all those birds?"

"Many questions, and all answered with a single answer," Corono said. "Gundar is the spirit of evil. Strange! We are supposed not to have concepts of good and evil, yet I use the word and have knowledge of its connotation. I must think on it. Perhaps I have opened up a new field of speculation...."

LARRY BROKE in. He knew Corono could go on for hours once a thought had come to him on which he could build. Larry wanted to know these things. "Later, Corono. About Gundar—"

"...Yes. Gundar. I don't know whether I can make it clear to you. Suppose I say that he is the father of us all. Would you understand more clearly? No, I don't think you would.

Or should I say that our evolution began with a bird instead of a monkey. But you couldn't understand that either."

"Ho-ld it!" Larry cried. "How did you know we began with an anthropoid? I never mentioned evolution to you."

"It was just in your mind," Corono smiled as gave answer. "I know this business of telepathy bothers you. It does me, sometimes, too. For the same reason. I don't understand it either. But every now and then we can 'read' someone's mind. Gundar can do it all the time. So let's get back to the birds.

"Gundar is actually the father of us all; he was the past, is the present and will be the future. He is eternal. You don't believe it, do you?"

He had seen the shocked look in Larry's eyes.

"Are you trying to say Gundar is..." He didn't want to continue. It would be sacrilege.

"Whatever you wish to call him," Corono replied "The race of evolution is about over. We have developed to the point where there is nothing in the beyond. So up there on Cycle Three we were faced with extinction because our creation and continuance was not a matter of race continuance by natural means.

"So some time in the past Gundar created men. Yes, Larry, I am a mutation. But not as you think of such, not a robot, an emptiness of mind, of spirit. Perhaps Gundar did not think we would be as we are. He created us to his immediate needs, the warrior and the man of science. We are the thinking kind, the warrior the acting. There are a hundred of us, altogether. The men you saw in the laboratory."

"But if Gundar is all," Larry said in shrewd observation, "he is also the motivation and the spirit. The two of

you are synonymous, surely."

"I sometimes wonder," Corono said. "Nor do I ever believe it will be made known to me."

ONCE MORE silence fell between them. Each wrapped the cloak of his thoughts about himself, each lost in memory.

"And the many birds. . . ." Larry asked in a low voice. "What meaning have they?"

"They are the dead," Corono said. "The dead in life."

"So Forgan is dead," Larry said softly. "I-I'm sorry to hear it. He was a roughneck, a loudmouthed character. Yet I knew him well, and I suppose loved him. For he was part of me, although he said he hated me, a part of me that was like an arm or leg."

"No!" came the startling words from Corono. "Forgan is *not* dead. He is still alive. Just a bird, that is all. Did you ever notice that only Gundar flutters down from his perch. The others never do. I believe that their incessant chatter is but the cries of anger against Gundar. Someday, maybe, some of those birds will escape. I don't know what will happen when they do. Nor have I any idea. But it would be interesting to see. And be there."

A chime struck somewhere and a light flashed in a far corner. The time had come for food. Corono had explained it to Larry. Since there were but two classes of men, warriors and scientists, the scientists had had to invent a means of preparing and servicing the distribution of food. It was one of the marvels Larry wished they had on Earth. Everything worked on a time schedule. There were huge kitchens which ran themselves. Food was grown artificially, prepared and sent to all parts of Koba by means

of a conveyer belt system.

Corono stepped to the wall section which held the food opening, slid the door aside and lifted out the tray and carried it to the couch. "Would you call Miss Kane, Larry?" he said.

Sleep had done her good, Gloria realized, as she answered to Larry's knock. He stood in the doorway, smiling down at her. He *was* handsome. And these weeks? months? years? or maybe minutes? had made a change in her mind about him.

She had not liked him when they first met. At Rainier he had been pleasant, but patronizingly so, she thought. But under the stress of danger he had shown a side she had not known of. First it had been admiration. Then as time went by the admiration deepened into something stronger. She was not yet ready to admit that love had come into her life.

"Hi, Larry," she greeted him, stretching and rubbing at her eyes with gently pressing finger tips.

"Greetings, Gloria," he said. "Have a nice sleep? I won't even ask about your headache. Corono's pills do wonders."

"Yes, they do." Her lovely eyes clouded. "If only they could make me forget that, that—" she hesitated, hating to even mention Gundar's name or shape. "Oh, well. Let's eat. There's a heck of a variety. I'm always excited by lunch or dinner or breakfast."

Larry laughed aloud. It felt good to laugh. She was right, though. The stuff looked appetizing, smelled good, but had no taste whatsoever.

SHE MOVED past him, her body filled with rhythm, her shoulders straight and her head high. She tossed him a wink over her shoulder and he winked in reply. *She* would never let him down.

They were washing the meal down

with the red liquid Larry called Chianti, when the summons came. They were to be ready on the instant. The invasion of Earth was to take place..."

The sky was filled with space ships. They were of all shapes and sizes, from the trim, tear-drop fighters, to the huge sky freighters, each carrying a hundred thousand fighting men. The silver shape of Venus was fading from view.

The wide pilot's seat held three. Corono's plane was a sleek job of his own design. As fast as the swiftest fighter, it had no armament. But as Corono said, "We are safe. Nothing can touch us. I have seen to it. And if there is a fight it will be proved. Like it, Larry?"

But there was no need for the Earthman to answer. He had been filled with admiration from the instant he had stepped into the small cabin compartment. He looked at the instrument panel. How simple! No great show of glass faces with mysterious dials, such as the ships he was used to. Here there were three dials, mysterious only in that, instead of numbers, there were characters. A stick did the maneuvering, just like in the planes of the twentieth century. There was nothing else.

"I sure do!" Larry was emphatic. He looked over his shoulder at the bird cage swinging gently to and fro with each movement of the ship. "How about you, Focus?"

"Ah, man!" said Forgan. "What a sweet job. Too bad we can't have a tele-cast of what's going to be. And I just wish that guy Gundar would only have let me change back to the way I was."

Larry shook his head in wonder. An orderly had walked up, carrying a covered cage, just as they were about to take off. Within the cage

was Forgan. And Forgan spoke English, not the bird chatter they had expected. His wizened face, smaller than a monkey's, resembled one in miniature. But the features were the same, as were his caustic comments on Gundar and what he wished he could do. They had asked him if he had a memory of what took place while he was in the aviary, but he didn't. Memory had returned of a sudden. Darkness enfolded him. Then light appeared and with it the faces of Gloria, Larry and Corono.

THEY HAD placed him on a perch designed for his use. Now he was a member of their crew, useless except for his talk, which always had the faculty of stimulating Larry, if only toward mayhem.

"Too bad fly-boy couldn't have had this job to play with. Wouldn't he be a hero to the gals back in the states. How about that, handsome?"

"Y'know, Forgan," Larry said, turning back to looking through the wide opening which showed a view of all the Heavens. "Some day I'm going to clip those wings. Then you'll be like the fly in the molasses. You won't like that."

"There'll never be the day you could lick me, one way or another. Even as a bird, I can still take you. Wanna try?"

"No. I'll wait for the day your ugly self will be back to normal. Then we'll settle what we started a couple of times."

"And when that time comes," Forgan replied. "I'll take you like I always have."

Corono was always amused by their exchanges. It was a stimulating talk. Nothing intellectual; yet it showed a depth of feeling foreign to him. He liked it. "I hope the time comes," Corono said. "I would like to see what

happens. Forgan has the strength. But I think Larry has the skill."

"Ain't never been a boxer could take a puncher," Forgan said. "I'll knock him right out of his shoes."

"I think," said a soft voice, "that we are going to have some excitement soon."

But they had already seen what Gloria noticed. The fighters, whole clouds of them, were peeling off into formations. It was the signal of approaching enemy craft. The sound of a buzzer was heard to break the silence and Corono fiddled with a small dial close to his right hand. Strange sounds filled the cabin, sounds which made sense to Corono but none to the others. And after a moment the sounds ceased.

"They have sighted the first attackers," Corono said. "We have orders to stay away from the fighting. So we'll have a box seat, as Mister Forgan calls it."

The ships of the Venusian fleet were easy to distinguish. Larry, Forgan and the girl were familiar with their markings. But for a while they had found it difficult to tell what shapes the ships of Gundar's fleet were. They took the shapes of clouds, of meteor tails, of tiny asteroids, of all the natural phenomena of the heavens.

Then the first of the Earth's fleet hove into view. The breaths of the three Earth people quickened at sight of the huge superdreadnaughts, the slick fighters, the tenders, slow and cumbrous, feeding energy to the large vessels. Larry knew what the scene would be on one of those immense creations.

Men would be at battle stations. Everything would be secure. Hundreds of thousands of men, equipped with space suits, would be in readiness for boarding orders, their heat rifles and

pistols at hand. In the meantime the tiny fighters, like hundreds of thousands of raindrops, would dart here and there among the enemy, dealing a quick blow at the belly of this freighter, engaging the enemy in dog fights, their green flames shooting from the gun mounts, as if St Elmo's fire had enveloped them.

"Watch," Corono's voice came as from a distance to Larry.

Larry's eyes followed the line of the scientist's pointing finger. A long line of troop carriers stretched in an immense arc across the heavens. They were protected by a veritable swarm of fighters and cruisers. The fighters and cruisers shot out to meet the Earth ships. And again Corono said, "Watch."

SUDDENLY, from both sides of the large ships, streams of flame poured. Larry had never seen anything like it. The flame was a separate entity. It left the muzzles of the guns and shot out for thousands of miles. And joined with the flames of all the ships. In an incredibly short time the entire troop-carrying contingent was surrounded, as it were, by an immense halo of living flame, which moved with the vessels at the same rate of speed.

In the meantime several of the fighters had broken through the circle of protectors. Straight for the troop ships they dove. And as they met the line of flame a terrible thing happened. The tiny craft simply disintegrated.

A horrified sound came from Gloria. But Larry could only curse under his breath. "Get those blasted devils!" Forgan yelled. But Larry knew it was in vain.

Another large group of fighters rushed to break through. And with them were the cruisers, heavier-armed, carrying stronger, more power-

ful guns. And as with the first, so with these. They vanished leaving not even a trace behind them.

"Well," Larry sighed. "Guess the troop ships are safe enough. Until they try to land. There are anti-special guns which could wreck them."

"All taken into consideration," Corono said. "Watch what happens to your dreadnoughts."

It was a terrible thing to watch, the disintegration of a proud and once-mighty fleet. Especially to men who were once part of it. But after the first single battles it became evident that the Earth ships could match the others in no way except speed. Retreat sounded for the remnants and they fled Earthward singly and in groups.

"All over now but the landing," Corono said.

BUT HE was wrong.

It proved to be a little tougher than he had thought it would be. Many strange and powerful weapons had been added to the armament of the Earth's forces since Larry was a member of the air force. The scientific knowledge of all the nations of the Earth had been pooled. Though Gundar did not know it the Earth had spies in the various Venusian courts. And since the Venusians could no more talk with braggadocio, it was only inevitable that the Earth would learn of the invasion. It was simply a matter of how much time would be permitted the defenders.

The first the invaders knew of it was when the bombers received orders to come in on their runs. Not a single Earth ship opposed them as they shot down to about ten thousand miles of the Earth and started on their runs. They started on their runs and completed them. But something was obviously wrong. There should have

been some visible signs of bombing in the screen which showed the area on Earth to be bombed. It was the vast New York section, six hundred square miles. Yet Larry and the others saw the skyscrapers still standing.

A mellow glow suddenly came to life in the cabin and directly above their heads the face of a man showed first then, in a second or two, the entire figure. It was Gundar. But a Gundar they had never seen before. This was a young man, tall and handsome, wearing the uniform of his rank, of which there was but one. A circlet of some strange glowing metal held silver hair in place. A pair of huge wings sprouted from his shoulder blades. But though it was a younger, more handsome Gundar, the evil in his face and eyes was no less than when he had the shape of the tiny bird.

"The Earth people," Gundar's younger, more mellowed voice began, "have proved they are no mean opponents. Therefore plan X will have to be followed until we have had a chance to study this new development. Corono! It is your duty to break through this veil of force they have thrown up against bombardment."

As quickly as it had appeared so did the light die. The three in the seat looked to one another. Corono's face showed the strain he was under. There was no choice. And he knew that it was only a matter of mental arithmetic before the formula of force would be worked out. It would be the end then.

"Corono," Larry's voice broke in on his reverie.

"Yes?"

"You once said you were the greatest scientist in Cycle Three. Are there any your equal?"

"I don't understand," Corono said.

"If you don't solve the puzzle, can anyone else?" Larry persisted.

Gloria and Forgan knew what he was driving at. The bird and the girl held their breaths. On Corono's answer might hinge the fate of the Earth.

"Perhaps," Corono said. "I'm not sure. There are some who might after a lengthy period. I can. In a very short time."

Larry bent his head as if in prayer. "Well Corono," he said. "We have become friends, haven't we? You hate Gundar! I have seen it time after time. Hate and fear him. But remember this. He can make you die but once. Refuse him! Call him and say you won't do it."

"I can't!" Corono said. And suddenly winked broadly. "On the other hand surely it won't be my fault if you take over this ship by overpowering me. After all I am a scientist, not a warrior. It would not be expected of me to risk my life...."

Gloria leaned forward and planted a kiss squarely on his mouth. His sallow features crimsoned. "I—I'm not sure," Corono said. "But I think I liked it."

LARRY looked at his watch, which he had never forgotten to wind, meaningless as it had been. Four minutes had gone by since Gundar had appeared in the overhead screen. He sighed softly and said in low tones: "Just turn sideways, pal. It won't hurt too much."

Corono did as he was bid. The upercut which knocked him out was delivered with the same exactness and precision as a surgeon's scalpel making an incision. Corono slumped to one side. And Larry took the controls.

He had timed it to the second. Once more the mellow light appeared and after the face and figure of Gundar.

"What is wrong, Corono?" Gundar demanded. Then his eyes narrowed, as if he were looking straight into

their cabin. "I see," he said softly. "Well, I have no time to waste...." the light did not fade as Gundar's voice did. It simply went out, as the old-fashioned electric bulb. And as it went out, the tiny vessel lurched and slipped. Larry twisted at the control stick. It moved as his fingers directed, but loosely, without bearing.

"Damn!" Larry said softly. "We're out of control."

"So bring the guy out of it!" Forgan suggested in his bird-voice.

"Of course," Gloria said.

"I guess I'm scared. Gundar isn't fooled easily."

"So it'll be one way or another," Forgan said.

Larry took Corono's head between his palms and shook him gently back and forth, massaging the nerves of the neck, stimulating the muscles. He could feel a pulse in the man's neck pounding steadily and surely. And after a while Corono's eyes fluttered, then opened wide. A silly grin parted his lips.

"Wha—what happened?" he asked.

"I knocked you out," Larry said.

"You di-id? And not a blow struck in my own defense. They'll call me coward," Corono said smiling broadly.

"They'll call you but you won't hear if you don't do something about this crate," Forgan said. "We're out of control."

"What!" Corono sat straight up at the words. "But that's impossible. We can't be."

"Then you take over," Larry said. "I can't make anything work."

The saturnine look returned to Corono's face again as he played with the controls. "I always maintained Gundar was the greatest scientist of us all. Imagine. By will alone he has thrown us out of control. Incredible."

"Never mind the compliments,"

Forgan's oddly raucous voice demanded. "Can you get us in control?"

"Yes. But Gundar must take his mind from us. The instant he does I will take over. Or rather Larry will. He is a pilot. And it will be up to him to make the ship behave as if it were still out of control. Gundar will have to think of something else. Especially if they have not solved the mystery of the block the Earth people have thrown up."

THEY WERE within the Earth's gravity. Their fall was directly into the Earth. Moments of vast tension went by. Drops of sweat appeared on Larry's brow as the minutes ticked by. Corono's face assumed a look of intense absorption. His knuckles held so tight to the control stick they became white from the pressure.

"Aah!" a windy sigh dropped from Corono's lips. "Take over, Larry. We're in control again."

Larry slid into the seat occupied by the other. Corono had not given him an easy task. The ship had to lurch and act crazily, just as a ship would which had gone out of control. Further, they might fall into the path of an Earth fighter ship as they neared the planet. Sweat poured from his face as he concentrated in getting free of all the obstacles.

He could not tell how many hundreds of thousands of miles they fell. He knew without looking that they had left the invading fleet far behind. But the one worry he had was getting safely to Earth.

"A million miles," Corono said. "Soon we will accelerate. By the time we have fallen another half million miles I will have figured out a way to get past the force blockade. I am sure it is that. Just keep control...."

But two thirds of the distance passed before Corono had it figured.

"There are weak spots in the force blanket," he said. "When we pass a certain point I will let you know. You will dive straight at the figure I show you on this dial. Keep it constant. Once we are within the Earth's atmosphere it will have to be up to your expert piloting to get us away from any fighter craft."

Time passed quickly. Then came the command. "Now!"

Larry depressed the stick and the ship responded on the instant. Their belts held them snugly and the cage in which Forgan was enclosed stood almost level. But there was no increase in pressure and after a while they became used to the terrific speed.

As a shaft of sunlight breaking through a cloud blanket so did they break into the Earth's atmosphere. Corono leaned forward and twisted at the second of the three dials. Their speed lessened immediately.

"Too fast to land at that rate," he said. "The rest is up to you. Just nod your head when you want to come in and I'll set it at landing speed."

Larry kept a sharp eye peeled for fighter craft. They were at the level he expected to find them. But not a thing was to be seen. Then they were at the cloud level of thirty thousand feet and Larry nodded. Below, they could see a green land. To the right lay a small range of mountains or high hills. Then as they swept lower they saw the shores of a wide ocean. Corono's eyes went wide. He had never seen the likes of it.

"The Pacific, I think," Larry said. "Well. Here we come in."

They landed without a jar. Corono pressed a small lever and the hatch opened. In a moment the three, Larry holding the cage with Forgan, stepped to the ground.

"Let me out," Forgan said. "The good old U. S. A. I want to kiss it."

"I FEEL the same way. But we don't have time. We've got to get to the authorities."

"Yes," said Corono. "And we'd better hurry. There won't be too much time."

It proved to be the most amazing thing but they had landed within fifty miles of the spot from which the momentous flight had begun. A farmer picked the three up and drove them into the nearest town, a suburb of Los Angeles.

It had been spring, the first part of May, when they had left. Now it was early summer. They could see the signs of it on all hands as they drove along the mountain road. Somehow they felt no surprise. But they did feel actual shock when they arrived within the environs of Los Angeles proper.

The farmer, a quiet man with steady eyes under thick brows, did not ask many questions. But his answers were direct and to the point, when they asked what had happened since their departure. Of course he did not see Forgan. Larry had thrown his kerchief over the small cage.

It seemed the Earth had known of the impending invasion for a month and had feverishly prepared for it. Los Angeles was deserted of civilian population. There were a hundred camps all along the mountain stretch from L. A. all the way to San Francisco. The military alone were permitted within the city limits.

It was to headquarters that Larry asked to be delivered. But the farmer could only take them to the first outpost.

A lieutenant took them in tow and shortly after they arrived at a garrison point. Here a colonel interviewed them. And saw to it they received a pass to proceed directly to the headquarters of General James McCall, chief of

command in the Los Angeles area.

General McCall, a tall man, with stern features, dressed in the quiet greys of a command officer, stood at their entrance. He offered his hand to Larry and Corono and bowed to the girl.

"I have been notified of your safe landing, and congratulate you both. But at the moment I am not in a position to provide the necessary plane escort. I hope you understand...?"

Larry looked at the man with a sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach. This man wasn't like some of the military he had known, obsessed with their invulnerability and importance and not caring to hear anything which they did not understand.

"But General," he began.

"Sorry, Lipton!" the General said decisively. "I haven't the time or patience to explain that we are at war with an unknown enemy. If men like you had been here at the time when the call came, instead of seeking your glory at more favorable pursuits..."

"The cage," Corono whispered. "Unveil it."

LARRY THREW the kerchief from the bars and revealed Forgan. For a second or two the General did not notice it. Then his eyes moved toward it and widened. And the words stopped dripping from his lips.

"We have just landed, General, after having escaped the enemy forces," Larry said quickly. "This is Corono, their number one scientist. We must get to Washington immediately."

"What-what is that horrible thing?" McCall asked.

"What was once a man," Larry said.

"And what's still a man!" Forgan growled.

The General stepped back a pace at the words which came from the gargoylish thing. He looked as if he had

been hearing things. And being afraid to believe them.

"If we delay much longer it may be too late," Corono's smooth voice urged. "Gundar can finish it all very quickly, once he lands. He will use the bird-warriors as a spearhead for the Venusian hordes."

Perhaps it was the mention of the Venusians? Perhaps it had been the sight of Forgan? But McCall suddenly swooped down on the hand mike and spoke into it. In a moment an officer in the uniform of air intelligence appeared.

"Take these people to Washington and bring them to the chief-of-staff. Give them clearance above anyone and everyone. This is triple-must important, Captain."

"This way, folks," the Captain said, ushering them from the General's presence.

It was hard to say which felt the better for the departure, the General or the four who left....

THEY NEVER reached Washington. There was no Washington to get to. Nor a New York. Gundar had found a way to break through the force umbrella. Someone else had figured out that there had to be slits in it to allow ships to pass through. As Corono said, it was only a matter of mathematics....

In fact they were lucky they had the chance to land.

For suddenly, as if from nowhere, there appeared a veritable swarm of fighter craft. Corono had spotted them first.

"Gundar! He has broken through!"

"Get it down before they spot us!"

Larry shouted.

Something in their tones made the Captain act on the instant. And not a second too soon. They came in at too great a speed and almost cracked

up. But the Captain was an excellent pilot. They watched the enemy disappear in the direction of Los Angeles in wordless apprehension.

"Where are we, Captain?" Gloria said, breaking the silence.

"Nebraska. Maybe fifty miles from Omaha."

The sun was sinking, night was about to fall. Larry thought fast. If Gundar had indeed broken through in force, and the invasion of the Earth was on, then the safest place would be some farmhouse. The large cities would be the first to feel the brunt of the attack. It would be a while before the routing out of the last defenders was affected. Gundar had the advantage in superior space weapons but invasions were fought with men....

The Captain's name was Oglesby. He listened in stony silence to Larry's espousal of his argument, that their safety and eventual escape lay in concealment for the present. It was obvious he didn't like it.

"....But why, Captain?" Corono asked.

"Might as well fight until we can't fight any more."

"That's no answer," Larry said. "It sounds like defeatism. Might as well put the pistol to your mouth and blow out your brains right now, if you feel it's only a matter of time. It'll be a lot quicker and probably less painful."

Oglesby became angry and wanted to fight. Forgan was all for it. But Corono threw oil on the tempestuous waters. "Now hold on. Since it has become impossible to reach our goal and since there is a difference of opinion on procedure, why not let each to his own devices. Captain Oglesby, since it's your desire to get to a fighting front as quickly as possible, the ship is still in the meadow...."

Oglesby stalked off in cold fury, his

bearing stiff as a ramrod.

They watched him go with mixed emotions. "The jerk!" Forgan said as the ship rose straight up and streaked off to the east.

"No," Corono said. "He isn't that. Fool, yes, but remember, he is following a set of convictions which he believes are his own."

"Aah! Nuts to him," Forgan said sourly. "What about us?"

"Well, Corono," Larry turned to the one man who might have the answer to their future, "suppose you say. What about us?"

"We will have to establish some sort of headquarters. I can give your scientists the formulas and know-how to make weapons which would enable them to fight successfully against Gundar. But this matter takes a certain amount of planning and work, and, as important, men and materials."

"Well," Larry said reflectively. "I imagine their plan of attack would be something like this. The large cities of the Earth, first. Then beachheads into the urban areas. It would take ten million men to overrun the United States alone. So they won't bother with the farm population except to establish garrisons at strategic points. Does that sound reasonable?"

Gloria shook her head in agreement and Corono nodded as if satisfied with Larry's reasoning. As usual Forgan voiced a raucous comment:

"I don't care what happens. But let me see action...."

CORINTHIS, Nebraska was a garrison town. Four hundred Venusians were stationed there. It was a jet-freight terminal for the wheat shipments of Kansas and Nebraska, so held a certain importance to the conquering forces of Gundar, who had proclaimed himself ruler of the planet Earth.

Night had fallen over the silent city. Not a single light showed. It was cloudy night, the moon peering fretfully from behind its curtain every now and then. When the moon showed its face the wide ribbon of concrete showed white against the dun-colored ground. And had one been a close observer one would have seen twin columns of men crawling along the grass and ditches to either side of the road.

At the head of one column Larry Lipton sneaked along on his belly. Corono mated him on the opposite side of the road. Behind them, in double rows, were two hundred men, each equipped with pistols which Corono had devised and which had been made up in hand forges in a dozen farm barns along the Nebraska and Kansas borders.

Four miles to their rear, hidden well in a shallow forest, lay a number of strange-looking cars, each equipped to hold twenty men and their arms. These cars looked like long grey cigars.

Larry lifted a circular disk to his lips and whispered into it:

"Corono! We are a half mile from the first road block. Disperse your men according to plan."

He counted off twenty-five seconds, then turned and whispered a command to his second in command. The shadows spread in a long thin line for a hundred yards. And Larry came to a crouching position and waved his men forward.

The Venusian road block consisted of twenty guards and a stone guard house. It was there so that all trucks bearing food shipments to Corinthis could be checked. Eight guards patrolled the road, their slate-grey bodies like tall shadows in the fitful light. When the moonlight struck them, bright bits of glittering lights cas-

caded from the jeweled ornaments at their waists.

The eight Venusians standing guard disappeared in thin wisps of vapor as men rose from the deep grass alongside the road and pressed the buttons at the sides of the pistols they carried. There was neither sound or smoke or light. Just a finger pressing at a button, and the pistol aimed correctly. Nor did it take any longer for death to come to the other twelve.

This was the first victory over Gundar in three months.

A HUNDRED miles to the east lay the town of Koropolis. It was a headquarters town for the top half of what Gundar called the third area. Six thousand Venusians were stationed here. On the same night the road block at Corinthis was taken, four hundred men and women in various disguises, mostly as farmers and their wives, came to the city. They came in trucks and some in old-fashioned twentieth-century farm wagons. Some came on foot. And others on the trains which Gundar allowed to come into the city twice a day.

Gundar had proclaimed the law of the conquerers, that everything is made for the use of the invaders, and for their relaxation. Koropolis was a town in normal times of fifty thousand people. With its added importance as a headquarters, it grew to triple its size. And with the coming of the Venusians, there also came the men who fattened on the misery of others, the worse-than-traitors who lived on the fats thrown off by the men who won the war. These set up shops which catered to the appetites of the Venusians.

Koropolis had become a city of inns and bawdy houses.

And of all the inns, three became a sort of center of attraction, for both

Koropolisians and Venusians. It was to these three inns that the four hundred men and women came.

A tall slender woman, whose hair was tawny and whose body was shown to effect in a tight-fitting overalled outfit affected by the wives of farmers, stepped into the huge place that was the Inn of the Clouds. Hundreds of Venusian soldiers were noisily drinking and carousing. Brooding farmers and their wives sat at many small tables along the walls. Some looked with disapproval at the number of girls who had suddenly found the company of the Venusian soldiery acceptable.

The tawny-haired woman stood at the entrance for a long moment until she felt that the eyes she wished to see had done so, then strolled with a hip-swaying movement toward a table among several others on a small platform.

Gloria Kane had spotted the insignia of the high commander of the headquarters area on the belt of one of the grey giants.

A grey giant came running forward and grabbed Gloria about the middle, his face lax, his mouth adrool from the effects of the heady liquor. His greenish eyes were aflame with desire. He crushed the girl close to him and tried to bend her back to kiss her. Suddenly he stiffened as she brought her knee up hard into his groin. Like an eel the girl slipped from his grasp and dashed across the room, a wild gleam of anger in his eyes, and a grin of derision on her lips. The giant recovered and dashed after her.

Straight to the table of the commander-in-chief Gloria ran. The giant caught her on the second of the three steps to the platform. And as his arm encircled her waist to drag her back, she looked straight

into the green eyes of the stiff-backed man at the head of the table. It was as if she had thrown a spark at him. He blinked and said:

"Leave her!"

For an instant the arm about her middle tightened. Then it relaxed and fell away. She didn't bother to turn to see what happened to the man. Right up to the table she marched and seated herself on the lap of the commander. Her hand went about his neck and the fingers of the other hand carressed the large, round bald head.

"These cattle are making this place impossible," one of the officers said. "More and more are coming here. Tonight, the place is crawling with them."

"YES," ANOTHER said, "This stuff we are drinking is strong. Boon-da is already drunk. Does he not see that for every one who comes in, four go out."

It was so. As if their disgust had become too great to bear, a large number of the men and women at the small wall tables had left. But their places were taken by others.

"You are charming, my dear," the commander whispered as his hand carressed her slender arm. "Very!"

"And you are a hero," she replied. They did not notice that her eyes were intent on the doorway. A small smile suddenly broke on her lips.

Three men or figures of men had suddenly appeared in the doorway. The figures, dressed completely from head to toe in a sort of dun-colored outfit, blocked the entrance completely. Their hands were held low against their hips and their fingers held a small pistol. Slowly the noise and drinking stopped as more and more of the Venusians saw the strange figures.

And finally complete silence fell away.

"What is this?" the commander shouted, as he started to shove at Gloria to get her off his lap.

"Friends of mine, commander," she said, as her fingers touched the back of his neck. The wires which led down to the index finger and thumb made contact against the flesh.

The commander toppled forward on his face. It was the signal they had been waiting.

As if by magic pistols like those the three held appeared in the hands of every man and woman in the place. The Venusians died as vermin do when crushed by a stone. Faint wisps of vapor marked their passing. And the few who tried to break through the three men at the door simply disappeared as the rest.

It was a regulation that only officers could wear arms in any of the eating or drinking places. That was why Gloria had taken it on herself to sit with the officers. The instant the commander fell forward she whipped a small pistol from a hidden pocket and pressed at the button and whipped it back and forth for a couple of seconds. As if by magic the table was cleared of Venusians.

The whole thing lasted some two minutes....

And as if nothing had happened the men and women who remained took up their possessions and left. It was as if a plague had suddenly come up and taken off every living being.

That scene was repeated in the other two inns. Twelve hundred Venusians died that night. And not a soul understood how it had happened. For as simply as the four hundred men and women made their way into Koropolis, so did they make their way out.

Nor was there a single person

among these four hundred missing....

GUNDAR called it 'The Room of the King'. Three hundred thousand humans had built it for him, this palace of marble and steel overlooking the wide Pacific. For some reason known only to him Gundar had liked the site though he had seen many all over the Earth. He sat and brooded, one palm holding up his chin, the fingers of the other hand lax on the arm of the chair that was an immense throne. Women of all the races and countries of the Earth, dressed in the flimsiest costumes, lolled on cushion along the walls of the gigantic room. Earthmen, traitors who had sold out to Gundar, Venusian warriors in all their trappings, and Gundar's own bird-men, stood, sat, leaned in groups, or by the side of the courtesans. Only Gundar seemed to show no interest in these women.

He had thought the entire Earth had been conquered. Commander after commander had reported this country taken and that until at the end there was nothing left to conquer. Then had come the first disquieting news. A small garrison in a Nebraska town had been wiped out one night. How it had been effected was a mystery. Then a greater mystery. The commander of the town of Koropolis and twelve hundred of his men had simply vanished into thin air.

And in rapid order came the news of the disappearance of hundreds of thousands of Venusian warriors in scattered communities all over the United States. Strange stories began to circulate. Of odd-shaped vehicles which rolled with the speed of the wind, of men and women in dun-colored uniform which were impervious to the blasts of heat-pistols, of hid-

den arsenals and meeting places. And of a foursome, a man, a woman, a stranger from another planet and a bird which had the face of a man. These four were the leaders of the revolt against the bird-men.

For it was the bird-men who were the terrible people. They had no feelings. Emotion was something they did not possess. To kill was to their liking. Destruction was something to feed on. They were the real rulers. And their feet were heavy on the necks of the people of the Earth.

Gundar knew the identity of the four.

He sat on his throne and brooded. Somehow he had to find them and exterminate them. He had in mind a special torture for Corono. It was he who was the prime factor in this revolt and resurrection. For resurrection it could surely be called. Men and women were no longer afraid to offer up their lives in the cause of freedom. It seemed as if the spirit of their forebears had suddenly come alive in their breasts.

Gundar projected his thoughts to the commander of a certain area:

"To the man or men who discover the whereabouts of these four I will offer a province and my protection. Larry Lipton, Gloria Kane, Corono, and Forgan.

"I will give the people of the Earth one week in which to disgorge them. Then I shall lay waste the land, kill off all the men-children, force the men into slavery and the women into bondage for my warriors and those of Venus. It is my command!"

DEEP IN the depths of the twisted ruins of what had once been the city of Chicago a vast community had been built. It lay underground in the vast installations which had once

housed the water tunnels which supplied the city's twenty millions of people with water. Three million men, women and children lived in these vast tunnels.

And among them were Larry, Forgan, Corono and Gloria Kane.

Forty men and women were gathered about an immense circular table. At the head sat Larry and his friends. Larry waited until the last of his group commanders found a seat at the table. Then he arose and said:

"I think the time is at hand. It must be now before Gundar organizes, before we become too unwieldy for our work, and mostly before the spy organization he has set up becomes effective.

"Soon or late we will be found out. Because we have acted as guerrillas we have been successful. Now we must act as an army. The weapons, men and materials are enough for our purpose. The final plans must be discussed here and now."

A short stocky woman arose as Larry sat down. Her face bore the scars of a great sorrow. She had lost a son and three sons in the holocaust of war. She was known as Annie the Killer!

"Gundar has offered a province for the capture of our leaders. A province...." she turned and spat. "And if by the end of the week the traitors are not turned up he will do what has already been done.

"I like this Gundar! He is a man! A man with wings. The angels were said to have worn wings. I read of them. But this monster is an angel of death. He must be destroyed, he and all the lesser winged monsters, and the grey hordes from Venus. I have spoken."

Another arose as the woman sat down. He was old, bent, and he leaned tiredly against the table edge.

His face was wrinkled with age but his eyes were keen and his voice, though gentle, held vestiges of the power which once had been his. He had been the Vice-President of the United States.

"It is always good to hear the gentle Annie talk. She never lets us forget the reason for our very existence. This is as it should be. But our wills and lives mean nothing. It is to the four who sit up there at the head of the table to whom we must look. It was their doing which has brought us to the heights we now occupy and lifted us from the depths of despair. So let them say what shall and will be done. Are we agreed?"

The forty voices rose as one in a shout of affirmation.

Larry looked to Corono, who nodded, stood and said:

"Good! And we are ready. There are fifty thousand of us here in the tunnels. Altogether there are two and a half million of us scattered the length and breadth of this land. And across the waters in other lands are another million. These must be coordinated. It is our plan...."

When he finished the men and women seated about the large table looked into each other's eyes and smiled. The day would soon be when the land would be free and men could look men in the eye as they had in the past, and not with the furtive fear they had to show.

THERE WERE four hundred Venusian ships in the three triangles. They flew low on patrol. It was unusual that so many ships were used, but this was an unusual patrol. A spy had reported to the Indianapolis headquarters that a large concentration of men, machines and materials were near a large forest eighty miles from the city.

What the commander didn't know

was that the spy who had done the reporting was a spy for Larry and the forty of his council.

The commander had sent up his entire fleet, three hundred fighters and a hundred bombers. They flew in three formations, with the bombers in the center triangle. If what the spy reported were true, the commander realized, he was made.

They flew low, secure in the knowledge that they were invulnerable. There had been not a single report of any anti-aircraft fire. Not even a report that the enemy had such guns. As for ships, it was preposterous. Hadn't they wiped the Heavens free of them?

So they cruised back and forth over the area described by the spy. Lower and lower they flew and slower and slower did they throttle down until their speed was a hundred miles an hour. There were no gun flashes to warn them. They did not even see the guns.

It was over in five minutes, by Larry's watch. Not a ship of the entire four hundred remained in the sky. Larry knew, however, that some messages had gone through. But he was satisfied. What Corono had invented would make them impossible to find. Corono had found a means of making a cloth invisible to the naked eye. And with it glasses which the Earthmen wore which permitted them to see the huge section of cloth. The entire insides of the anti-aircraft gun barrels were coated with the paint. They were impossible to see from a foot away.

It was the first important victory the Earthmen had over the combined forces of Gundar and his Venusian allies. Nor was it to be the last. The invisible paint which Corono had invented placed victory within their grasp.

But they reckoned without Gundar. He had a very good idea that the camouflage was paint. And that only a certain optical glass, colored in such a way and with only such a chemical which would permit the light beam to become visible, would be effective against it, spurred his scientists toward that goal. They solved the puzzle eventually but not before Gundar and the Venusians had been driven out of all but their last stronghold.

The forces of the Earth were now on the march. There had been a gigantic upsurge of power. A government of the world had been proclaimed, the council of forty was the official voice of that body, and millions of soldiers had been enlisted and outfitted. Even the air force had been revived and refurnished with ships and guns. The great cities of the Earth had been put to use, plants had begun the manufacture of war materials and victory seemed in sight.

Then came the night of the 'message'.

It was a voice, a voice which had been heard in every corner of the world. The voice simply said, "I shall destroy the whole world if it does not lay down its arms. Furthermore, if the four arch-enemies are not placed in my hands within the next twenty-four hours, I will then make good my threat."

THE COUNCIL of forty were in session at the instant of the broadcast. It was as if Gundar knew they would be. Larry paled at the words and turned and looked at Corono.

"Would he...?" he couldn't finish what was on his mind.

"Yes. I think he would," Corono said. "And he has the means. I know because I gave it to him. Gundar is

clever as a devil. He took into consideration the fact that perhaps all wouldn't go well. So he told me to make a weapon which would destroy this planet should he fail in his invasion plans.

"What is more, we can't stop him."

"But if you invented it why can't you invent something which would...."

Corono was shaking his head all the while Larry was talking. Larry stopped and waited for the other to say what he had to.

"It is only a pinch of powder," Corono said. "My greatest invention. It sets up a disturbance. Small at first, like the start of the whirlwind, it grows in intensity until the whole planet is involved in the mad whirling dance. And finally it spins out of control into space. Nothing can stop it once that pinch of powder is released. I do not have to say what happens to those on the surface of the planet, do I?"

There was no need to answer.

"So we've got twenty-four hours, eh?" a raucous voice demanded. "So let's get on the ball. What the hell! We ain't licked till the last man's out. And it's our turn at bat...."

It was the voice from the bird-cage, Forgan's voice. The expression on the tiny gargoyle face as truculent as ever, the sneer in the voice dominant as the desire to live. Larry reached over, picked up the cage and said:

"I never thought the day would come when I'd want to kiss that double-ugly pan of yours. But it has. And if ever we can get you out of this wire gimmick, I'm going to do it, if I have to get punched in the nose for it."

"S matter? Gettin' soft?" Forgan asked. But the wide grin took the sting from the words.

"Well, if he isn't," Gloria said, "I am. And if he doesn't keep his promise, I will for him."

"For that I'll wait," Forgan said.

But though the words were wonderful to listen to Corono wanted to know what was going to be done about it.

"There's only one thing we can do about it. Since Mohammed wants us to come to him, let's. Gloria did it several times. So have you and so have you. Maybe not to Gundar, but to others. It's just another place we haven't visited. How about it?"

"As Forgan would say, I'm game," Corono replied.

"All right, then. We've got twenty-four hours. Will Gundar give us another twenty-four hours?" Larry asked.

"If I know Gundar, he won't. His will is not the kind to be brooked. Further, he makes the decisions. He said twenty-four hours, and he meant just that. Whatever is on your mind will have to be accomplished in that period."

"Then here's what we do," Larry said. "Forgan will have to remain here, of course... Sorry, pal," he broke into Forgan's objections, "...this is one time you're out of the picture. We can't take a chance dragging you along. The girl, Corono and myself will get into this Room of the King he built near Los Angeles. Here's how...."

THERE WAS a disturbance before the vast gates of the city walls. The armed guards looked on in amusement. An unkempt beggar was screaming imprecations at the head of a cavalcade of motor-jet cars. The man beside the driver looked coldly at the beggar and tossed him a couple of coins and the mendicant bowed so low his broken nose seemed to touch the ground. Then the well-

dressed man motioned for the sergeant of the guard to step close.

"I do not have a pass to enter," he said. "But if you will notify the King's chamberlain that I have Gloria Kane prisoner it will go well with you."

The mention of her name worked wonders. In a few moments the gate swung wide and the lead car and its three mates drove into the city of Los Angeles. Already there to meet it was an honor guard, with Savor at its head. He stopped the car with an imperious gesture and said:

"Who are you? And where is the woman?"

The man answered softly: "I am Jake Jones. And I like the color of a man's money. It's the only thing I have ever liked. See? The King wants to see the dame, nobody but the King gets to see her."

The grin was wiped from his lips at Savor's sudden gesture; a heat pistol thrust its unwavering muzzle into the man's belly.

"The girl!" Savor demanded.

"In the third car," came the surly answer.

Savor's face bore a wild expression of triumph, as he peered into the darkened interior and looked into the eyes of Gloria Kane. "So! It is she! Gundar will give you more than just money, Mister Jones," Savor shouted. "He will make you a Prince. Come! To the palace...."

Nobody noticed that the beggar had flattened himself along the wall and, as the last car went through, so did the beggar. Nor did anyone see that the man slipped from the rear of the last car as Savor was questioning the driver of the lead car.

The night was moonless. Not a soul walked the darkened streets. At least no one who saw the ragged beggar sidling along the curbstone, head

bent as if he were looking for a dropped cigarette, or coin. It was a street of pretentious homes, semi-estates. It was the street on which Tom Heine lived. Suddenly the beggar walked over to the wall fronting the house and slumped against its pink stone. A cab pulled up before the house and a man got out. The man walked with a limp. A grey beard covered his lower lip and mouth. He paid the driver and limped toward the entrance. The beggar accosted him with open palm and the limping man dropped something into it. The beggar lurched off.

An hour later the same beggar was seated before the curb of a darkened door. The door bore letters which said there was a restaurant on the second floor. A cab stopped before the curb and two men got out. One limped, wore a beard and gold-rimmed spectacles. The second man was Tom Heine. Heine paid the driver and he and the limping man opened the door to the restaurant and walked in. And after a moment the beggar tried the door. It opened easily and the darkness swallowed him also.

"**WE DID IT!**" Larry shouted as obscure figures closed in on him. "We did it!"

Instinct made him strike even before he realized the figures he thought were Corono and Heine were not. His fist sank into the soft belly of a man. Then the figures were on him, striking with clubs, with fists, pummeling him to the ground and finally into unconsciousness.

He opened his eyes and felt the dull stab of pain strike his eyeballs. He tried to repress the groan which came to his lips but it escaped him.

"Larry," a voice whispered. "Are you all right, boy?"

It was Tom Heine.

"I-I guess so," Larry replied. "But I wonder what they hit me with, the ring posts?"

"They got this Corono friend of yours and me before we could open our yaps. Damn! I wonder how they got wise?"

"Too late for that," Larry said. "Where are we?"

The darkness was complete. He could make out the dim outlines of a window, felt the embrace of walls, and knew he was bound. He rolled in the direction of Heine.

"Try these knots, Tom," he said. "Maybe I can do the same for you."

But they were knots fashioned from wire. It was no use trying to get free of those. Larry lay back and tried to figure out how it was they had been betrayed. Who could have done it and for what reason? It had to be someone in the council. It had been so simple. Gundar was not alone in having men spy for him. There were more who worked for Larry and the council of forty. That was how Tom had been contacted and how the elaborate masquerade was arranged. Now it was all over.

He gripped himself hard at the thought which had suddenly come to mind. What about Gloria? If they knew about Corono and Larry's disguise they also knew about the ruse which had allowed Gloria to get trapped. And where was Corono? What bit of terror had they in mind for him?

HE LIFTED his head as the door to the room opened and light streamed in. He saw the figure of a man outlined in the light. It was impossible to make out who the man was. But the huge shadow made the wings which folded back along the blades even more grotesque and fear-

some than the man himself.

"My friend," a resonant voice proclaimed in pious horror. "How pitiful your state!"

Gundar waited until Larry had spent himself in empty cursing. Amusement crept into his voice:

"Did you think Gundar would be fooled by these theatricals? Beggar's costume, an old fool for an accomplice. The business of Gloria's capture and a man who wears gold-rimmed glasses and walks with a limp. Really!

"But now the play is over and the musicians must receive their tokens of payment. Take this young fool to the room prepared for him. And leave the old one here."

A dozen men stepped forward and while some stood guard others lifted Larry up and carried him down the length of a hall and into a large, well-lighted room. Gundar followed. They undid the bonds of his legs and held him erect against a wall while they made him secure to one of a number of bolts which protruded their lengths from it.

But Larry had eyes only for the figure of a man who hung limply from one of the bolts. It was Corono. And someone had gone to work on him. The scientist was bare to the waist and blood poured in slow streams from the ribboned flesh, where either a whip or lash had shredded him.

"Oh! He is alive, if that is what is worrying you," Gundar said. "The flesh can take a terrific amount of punishment. As you will find out." He gestured suddenly with a beckoning finger. And three half-nude men stepped forward. They were squat creatures, with shaven skulls and thick, muscular bodies. Each carried a long-handled lash. Gundar smiled pleasantly, as he said, "Strip the clothes from this one."

Larry gulped as the lash whistled and struck. Fire raced down his chest. A streak of flame seared his shoulder, and another caught his right arm. He strained against the bonds until blood seeped from between the wires. Once more the three slashed at Larry and this drew what Gundar wanted to hear, a high whinny of pain and terror. Four more times the whips slashed and tore at him. They stopped then, only because he was no longer conscious to feel.

Gundar made a face of disgust. He spoke aloud. "Sad. Very sad that a man can no longer enjoy what was once his greatest pleasure. Perhaps the woman will renew my lease on life. I have my doubts on that score. These Earth people have no fire in their veins. Aah, well. Time will tell..."

"**L**ARRY! LARRY!" a voice was calling him back from the land of the dead. He tried to open lids which seemed glued to each other. Again the urgent call. Oh, but it was so good to float on that unguent stream where the water ran so smoothly over one's naked body. There was only content in that wondrous tide. Once more the call. *Hang the man!* Why couldn't he let one alone?

Might as well open one's eyes and see who it is that calls. But this stickiness, this difficulty in prying them open by will alone. But of course. One had only to lift one's hand and use one's finger tips.

The scream which came from Larry Lipton's lips had the sound of insanity in it.

"Easy, Larry!" Corono shouted. "Easy boy! We can't lose our senses now."

"Aah! Aah!" Larry sighed windily. "Ohh. I feel as if I'd been bathed in fire. Whew! Aah! I can't take too much of that."

"I don't think we'll have to. Gundar tires quickly of everything. He didn't know it but I was awake when he gave his usual soliloquy. He won't bother us again until the time comes for our departure from this veil of tears."

"But before that time we must free ourselves. We must. He has Gloria in his power."

Larry steeled himself to think on a straight line, to forget this horrible pain which possessed every fibre of his being, which insisted on making itself felt at every second. Self-hypnosis! It was the only way. And after a while he forgot. He forgot because he willed himself to; there were other, more important things than himself to consider. But though he forgot his pain he could not think of a single way in which freedom could be obtained.

"You're right, pal," he said. "I'm trying to think. But it's no good. Gundar has us by the short hair."

Corono laughed shortly. "Perhaps after our bellies are full. It is always easier to think on a full stomach."

"How do you know we are going to eat?" Larry asked, just to hear himself talk. His mind was on other thoughts.

"The thoughts of one of the guards were projected to me," Corono said.

"**O**HH. WHAT was that?" Larry's voice bristled with excitement.

"I said that I had received a mental image of one of the guard's thoughts."

"That's what I thought you said. Corono! I think we've got the answer. If you can get a mental picture of a thought, why can't you project one? Why can't you order the guard to release us?"

"Why—I had never thought of it in that light. But how simple it would be. Thought projection-command is a

matter of superior mental powers. Wait! Let us see how well it works...."

A dozen men walked into the lighted-room. They walked with the mechanical steps of automatons. While one of their number unlocked the bonds which held Corono and Larry to the wall, the others waited, stiff as stone statues. Then, at another voiceless command, they handed their arms to the two men.

"How long will they remain like that?" Larry asked as they stalked stealthily down the hall.

"So long as they receive no other command. But you have opened up a new field of control for me, Larry. And possibly a way to circumvent Gundar."

As one, they heard the marching sound of sandalled feet. They melted into a break in the wall, as if they had become shadows. A half dozen winged soldiers walked by and disappeared down the shadowed far end. Once more the two men advanced.

They came at length to a corridor which forked two ways, both at right angles to the main corridor. Corono held Larry's arm and closed his eyes. "Down this way," he said. "I opened my mind and received an impression of voices in this direction."

It was a hall of magnificent statuary, of wondrous paintings, of elegant furnishings and drapes. Not a soul disturbed the tranquility of the marble floor, not a breath of sound the quiet of its golden walls. Only a pair of shadows slipping along, taking advantage of every fold of drape, of every column which might hide one. And at the end a pair of huge doors, a hundred feet in height, blazing with the gems of an entire planet's sacking. The gate to the Room of the King!

Once more there was the sound of marching feet, but this time a great

sound, as of many, many feet.

"In here!" Larry whispered.

The crimson folds of a pair of magnificent silk drapes closed their beauty about the two men. And though they could not be seen, they could see. At the head of a long line of winged soldiers, Savor, his eyes set straight forward, his shoulders back stiff as always, marched. Larry stopped counting at a thousand. A wide grin was on Corono's lips when the last of the winged men marched through the open gates, which had swung wide to receive them, and had closed themselves after the last passed through.

"Larry," Corono said, as he stepped squarely before the huge doors, legs spread wide in an attitude of reckless abandon, his naked back and shoulders bearing the unhealed welts of the lashing he had gotten. Larry felt his breath catch at the magnificent display of bravado. This was a man. "This is it, Larry!" Corono said, as he turned for a last look at Larry. Then his brow knit in terrific concentration. Larry felt sweat trickle down his eyes, as he tried to put himself in his friend's place.

And after a while the huge doors began to open, slowly....

GLORIA FELT the heat of shame sweep over her. Not even in the nude had she felt so naked, so much the cynosure of all eyes. A feeling of the deepest sadness overwhelmed her. Her lover, her friends, the greatness of their mission, all gone. Despair rode herd on her. How could they have thought themselves so clever as to imagine they could win out over this winged devil, Gundar?

She thought back to how he had received her. It was as if she were an insect under the impersonal gaze of a microscope. His eyes had looked her over as if she were something strange

to him, a worm, an anything but human being. Then Gundar had smiled. And that was even worse, for in his smile there was a promise. A promise he had made to himself on another world, a promise to discover what the opposite sex could mean to Gundar.

"Really, Miss Kane," he said. "All this buffoonery wasn't needed. This play of being captured and this elaborate business of being brought here. Mister Jones is receiving his reward. I promised it to the man who brought you here. And he shall get it, never fear. A province. The whole of an iceberg at the North Pole. He shall be chained to it forever, so that no one shall not know it is his. Is that not a fine reward?"

Gloria's head had come up. "The sort of reward a devil like you would think of," she had said in scathing tones.

Laughter had gone up at her words. Gundar's smile deepened. "My friends seem amused by you, Miss Kane. I wonder if their amusement will grow when I tell them you are to be my Empress?"

His evil eyes swept the length and breadth of the huge room. Not a soul dared look into those eyes. His mouth sneered.

"Bah! Less than worms, I find you!" he lashed at them. "Take them away. The whole lot of them. Venusians and all."

He dismissed them on the instant nor did he look to see whether his orders were being carried out. Instead his eyes searched hers.

"They weary me with their fawning, sycophantic ways," he said. "And those clumsy louts, the Venusians. They think to kill a man is the supreme art! And so clumsy at it, so lacking in finesse. But they live but to die. How can they understand?"

"Miss Kane. Your friends will soon

be here to, as they hope, release you. The wires attached to your body. They will do you no good. Gundar is not taken in by such foolery. So make yourself at ease and allow your good judgment to hold sway. While there is life there is hope, it is said. Do not give up."

He was laughing at her. She knew it. His words about Larry and Corono. He knew of their whole plan. What was the use. She did not realize what she was doing. Her fingers swept up and aimed themselves at the side of her throat.

But they never reached their goal. It was as if she had become paralyzed. She could not move a muscle. Gundar stepped from the dais and moved to her side. His fingers slipped the wires from her hand and threw them to one side.

"Now, my dear," he said. "If you wish to play, there are better games than suicide."

He bent and pressed his lips to hers. For an instant surprise gripped her. Then her hand came up and slapped at him. The marks of her fingers were white against the suddeny scarlet skin as he stepped back.

"My dear," his voice was silky. "I have never kissed a woman. I know it is an Earthly custom. Is the slap part of the game?"

HE DID not wait for her answer. Instead, he turned to the winged warrior who served as his chamberlain and said, "Dress her as is the lowest of the courtesans and send her under escort to the barracks of the Venusian soldiers. She is to be their plaything until they tire of her. Then..." his shoulders shrugged and he turned and walked from her.

Now she looked at the filmy covering which but served to only accentuate her charms and bowed her head.

She was to be taken before Gundar first, so that he could look at her shame.

The winged chamberlain gestured with his head for her to follow him. And once more she was in the Room of the King. She saw that this time she was the only woman in the place. Fully a thousand men were crowded in the vast room. Yet so large was it, that when the doors swung wide and Savor marched in at the head of two thousand foot soldiers, not even they filled the place.

The chamberlain waited to one side. Gundar was busy in discussion with a gigantic Venusian. Whatever Gundar was saying did not sit well with the grey giant.

"No!" he shouted suddenly. "The men of Venus are not children to be bilked of their rightful spoils so easily. Gundar. Your promise must be kept."

Something in the Venusian's tone made Gundar look up in surprise. What was wrong with the man? They had been talking easily and to mutual agreement, and suddenly this shouting. Silence fell on the vast hall. The grey giants from the Silver Planet, Venus, suddenly turned grim. Was something amiss?

"Now, Hag-U." Gundar tried to calm the other down. "You did not hear me aright."

Hag-U stepped back a pace, his hand low at his energy-pistol. "I heard you aright, Gundar!" he shouted. "Treacherous knave!"

The words were a signal for bedlam to let loose. In an instant every man in the vast room went berserk. The giant Venusians were skilled warriors, though Gundar made small of their ability. With the first shot they formed into small groups which went to make up a larger one, which in turn became the point of a triangle

aimed straight at the dais.

And as more and more Venusians joined the small groups they gravitated toward the wide base of the triangle so that as some fell more would take their place.

The winged soldiers of Gundar took wing on the instant. The green flashes of heat energy filled the air and made the heat unbearable. On the dais Hag-U seemed frozen in the truculent attitude of hand on energy pistol. His lips grimaced in hate, his eyes gleamed, and his body was tense. But Hag-U was dead. Gundar had killed him with a single look.

But though Gundar's soldiers fought, Gundar was no longer there to see the outcome of the battle. He had whirled, seized Gloria and dragged her through the narrow archway of an ante-room. She tried to struggle against him, but he held her in a grip that was like steel. She even tried to drag herself against him, but he pulled her as if she weighed ounces, and after a while she moved swiftly behind him.

THE WAY was in gloom, the ceiling but a few feet above them. It was Gundar's passage to his aviary. He stopped before the doors and they swung open for him. And once more Gloria imagined herself back on that terrible planet from which they had escaped. The same birds chattering their twittering sounds.

Gundar threw her to a couch close by, while he sat deep within the sheltering arms of a large wing chair. His eyes were clouded in deep thought. His fingers tapped restlessly on the arms of the chair. Now and then the fingers of one hand came up to caress the chin.

"I don't understand," he said after some time went by.

"I don't understand. It is as if

someone *commanded* Hag-U to say what he did. His death is meaningless. I was tired of the boor, anyway. But this wild fray which is taking place. I don't understand it at all."

"Perhaps Gundar is losing his powers," Gloria taunted him. "Perhaps their strength is greater than yours...?"

He shook his head. "No! It is not that! I must reason it out. Be still, woman!"

He kept shaking his head as if he could not bring his mind to an understanding of the situation. The solution came to him in a flash. "Hah! Someone *is* commanding them. Corono. He is the only one who has the power. Now we shall see...."

His eyes closed and a look of intense concentration came over his face.

THE GREAT gem-studded doors swung wide. Larry's reflexes came into instant play. He had glimpsed the huge grey bodies pressed close to the doors as they started to come open. His arm swept Corono into the protection of the great fold of drapes which hung alongside one of the sections. Then the thousands of fighting men swept out into the corridor. Men died and were trampled by others taking their place. Above, the winged men flew and darted down in swift dips to empty their heat pistols into the bodies of the Venusians. Larry saw that it was only a matter of a short time before the grey giants would be wiped out.

But the present was not the moment of the grey Venusians' defeat. They gave as good as they got and the battle swayed this way and that. Gundar's winged legion had but the weapons of their wings and their side-arms. The Venusians carried short, wide swords with which they did devastating work at close quarters. And

since a great part of the fight *was* at close quarters, the walls, drapes, statuary, floor, were soon covered by a slick coating of crimson.

It was the winged divers who decided the battle. Had it been man to man, or even pistol against pistol, the Venusians would have won out. But it wasn't. So in the end they were forced back down the length of the long corridor, back until the sound of the battle was a small echo in the ears of the men behind the folds of the drape.

"What now?" Larry asked.

"I-don't-know," Corono said hesitantly. "Gundar-knows-who forced this issue. *Stay close Larry!*" The last was said in a rush of words.

Corono stiffened suddenly. Sweat stained his face and gave it an oily appearance. Slowly, step by straining step, he moved through the wide-open gates, Larry close at his heels. Down the immense length of the Room of the King, Corono walked. His face was intense with concentrated mental strain. Larry could not speak. He knew a single word would break the tide of battle in Gundar's favor. And without being told, he knew Gundar had established contact with Corono.

It was the last battle, the end for one of the two, and possibly the end for all the Earth people.

The look of strain departed, though sweat still poured in steady streams from Corono's features. He was no longer tense. But it wasn't because the issue had been decided in his favor. It was only the state of mind he had placed himself in. A complete forgetfulness of surroundings.

YEARS SEEMED to pass as the two men walked slowly, laboriously; it was evident Corono did *not* want to meet Gundar face to face. The narrow archway seemed an interminable distance. Yet it was only a matter

of moments altogether, and they stood framed in the arch. Then they were through.

Corono's guttural breathing was the only sound in the stillness of the covered areaway. Larry's breath came in slow, shallow gasps, audible only to himself, like the slow, steady pounding of his heart. Then the narrow door confronted them. As if by its volition, it swung wide and the two men stepped over the threshold.

Instantly, the spell was broken for Larry.

He was back on the planet from which the invasion had begun. It was the room of the birds again. They perched on their bars, tier on tier of them, swinging gently to and fro, millions of them, tiny symbols of Gundar's power. Their voices were still. Yet Larry had the odd impression their eyes were intent on the mental battle going on below them.

He looked up and up at them, to where the last row perched on a swinging bar fully two hundred feet from the floor. A wild thought came to him. A man's mind had placed them in their present voiceless form, because he had feared, or hated, or simply because some had incurred his displeasure. Perhaps it would only take another's mental effort to free them?

He turned quickly to see how Corono was doing. And saw Gloria for the first time. He gulped at the sight of her lovely body, so captivatingly displayed in the flimsy bits of lace network Gundar had forced her to wear. Her eyes met his for a second and in them he read for the first time the love she bore him. Yet he could not go to her, despite the sudden ache his arms developed for her. First Gundar's will had to be broken.

The stillness deepened until the silence was unbearable. There was menace and fear and terror in it. Even

the birds seemed to feel it. They left their perches and flew aimlessly, silently about, and not even the flutter of the countless wings gave sound to the electric air.

There was only the slow slithering of Corono's feet as he advanced straight for Gundar.

Gundar was still seated in his chair. He seemed completely relaxed. No sweat stained his face, no strain narrowed his eyes. He seemed, in fact, to stare with complete abstraction at Corono, as if he were amused by the incident. Then Larry's eyes fell to Gundar's fingers on the arms of the chair, and the hope which had died when Corono mentioned Gundar was aware of the cause of the battle was renewed. It was only on the surface that Gundar was relaxed. Corono's will was thus far a match for his own.

As if Gundar was conscious of it, he said:

"Well done, Corono. I created you too well in my own image. But remember! I am the creator, and the destroyer, too."

For the smallest instant Corono's attention was diverted. And in that second Gundar acted. He stood swiftly, with a fluid motion that was like water. He took a single step forward and stared deeply, intently into Corono's eyes. And this time there was no doubt of the effort he was putting out.

Larry became aware of the ticking of his wrist watch. The sound was maddening. Each second ticked off the approach of doom. Corono was going to lose this battle of hypnosis. Larry *knew* it! Something had to be done. He looked wildly about him. He had forgotten completely the heat pistol in his hand. He wanted only some familiar thing, a club, a knife, something with which to strike that haughty evil face, to make the monster tear

his eyes away from Corono's.

BUT OF A sudden Larry was powerless to move. As if Gundar had read his mind, he chained Larry to immobility.

But not Larry's voice. Those wildly fluttering wings had given him an idea.

"The birds!" Larry shouted. "They hate Gundar."

And as Gundar's words had broken the concentrated effort of Corono, so did Larry's break that of Gundar. He looked away for one startled instant. And in that instant Corono sent a thought winging its way into the breasts of the closest perch.

Like a myriad of tiny arrows the birds dove straight down at Gundar.

But swift as was their action, even more swift was his. Whirling, he dove for the door to his left, and as he moved with a speed too great to intercept, he grabbed up Gloria under one arm.

Larry threw an arm out to stop him: Gundar's hold on him was broken the instant the birds were released, but Gundar crashed a stone-hard fist into Larry's face, knocking him to the floor. Larry heard Corono's voice as from a long distance.

"...There are too many of you. Perch by perch— So! That is better...."

Larry lifted himself from the floor and made for the door through which Gundar had escaped. He had seen what Corono was doing. But he had a single thought in his mind. Gundar had Gloria!

"Wait, Larry!" Corono shouted as he dashed after his friend.

The passage on which the door opened was dark and damp. Bare stone lined it and moisture was exuded from the pores of the rocks. Like some wild thing in pursuit of another, Lar-

ry ran, and behind him came Corono. The way was long. But the sound of Gundar's pounding feet ahead lent wings to Larry's own. Gundar was hindered by the weight of the girl. Larry was only a few feet behind the two when they broke into the open.

They were on a large, square of open space. Below, to the right, was the swelling, crean-capped Pacific. The thunderous sound of surf breaking on jagged rocks was loud in his ears. To the left, and extending for a hundred miles, were the myriad lights of Los Angeles. But Larry took all that in with part of his mind. His whole being was focused on the winged figure of the man in whose arms a lovely half-nude girl lay.

With a gesture of contempt, Gundar tossed the girl from him. She fell and lay still, as if in death. But the heaving of the snow-white breasts gave the lie to that. A wild laugh came from Larry's lips.

"So it's going to be man to man!" he said. "Or are you frightened of man to man?"

Suddenly Gundar's wings opened wide. They spread a full ten feet each way from his shoulder blades. "You see how easily I could have escaped," Gundar said softly. "But first I must remove a blot, a stain from my mind. And I must do it physically, because I made the mistake of allowing a physical contact by you Earthworms. Come to me, my friend, come to this warm embrace."

LIKE A TACKLER diving for the man with the ball, so did Larry dive at Gundar. And Gundar met him with a slashing swipe of his forearm. Larry skidded across the smooth stone to land against the waist-high parapet. He arose, shaking himself as he did, and came forward, arms and hands in a fighter's pose.

Gundar waited until Larry was a few feet off, then stepped in. Larry fainted, and Gundar made no move to protect himself. Then Larry threw a straight right into the other's face. The blow landed and Gundar staggered back. A thin stream of blood poured from one of Gundar's nostrils. He felt of it and held his fingers in front of him, a look of intense surprise on his face, as if he never seen his own blood before.

But Larry didn't wait to see what Gundar's reaction to that was going to be. His fists shot out like the strokes of a trip hammer, and slashed and hooked at the hated, evil features before him. Gundar fell back before the wild savage blows. Now he was bleeding from both nostrils and from a cut over the eye, and a lump appeared on the flesh below the left cheekbone.

Larry followed the retreating body relentlessly, driving his fists home hard, trying for the knockout punch.

Then Gundar struck. Only once, too swiftly for human body to avoid. Larry took the clumsy blow on his left shoulder. Had it been in the face it would have smashed flesh and bone to pulp. The punch lifted him in an arc, to land in a skidding heap fully twenty feet away. Larry lifted himself by sheer power. His shoulder was numb and his arm hung limp at his side. But he still had his Sunday punch to throw, and he always used his right arm for that.

Even his brain was numb. He knew only that he had to smash that evil leering face to shreds. There was someone shouting to him, a voice which was familiar, but he could not attend to words. Not while Gundar was still standing.

But Gundar was no longer standing still. He came forward at a run.

"Now you will die!" Gundar shouted. "You have profaned my body.

Death is the payment for that!"

Larry tried to leap aside, tried to duck the outthrust arms. But they enfolded him in a grip that was like a pair of steel bands. He felt himself lifted on high. He could see the rush of waters below, could hear their breaking on the saw-toothed rocks, and he felt himself fall....

HE ROLLED over and saw a strange thing. Gundar was being lifted on high by a dozen birds of such size as Larry had never imagined existed. They were fully twenty feet from back to tail-tip. Straight up the birds bore Gundar and then to one side. When they released him Gundar fell like a plummeting stone, and after him the wings, torn from the living flesh of his shoulder blades. Larry heard and shuddered at the pulpy sound the body made as it struck the rocks a thousand feet below.

Then Gloria was in his arms, a shuddering, whimpering Gloria, almost wild with hysteria that was at the very edge of her finger tips, on the tip of her tongue. Larry caressed the fear and fright away with gentle words and stroking fingers until the shudders left her, and her eyes looked up at him with love.

Corono cleared his throat. Startled, the two looked at him. There was a shy grin on the scientist's lips.

"Don't you think there is a time and place for that?" he said.

"Yes!" Larry replied. "And the first thing we're going to do is find it. But first we've got to get to a preacher. There are a few words we have to hear."

Corono looked blank. Larry explained quickly, as they made their way back to the aviary.

"....And I guess it'll be the first wedding attended by two best men," he said in closing.

But he was wrong. At least insofar as time was concerned. There were many things which had to be attended to first. And many things explained. Gundar's death brought many problems. There were an immense number of men and birds to be released from their bondage. Corono had only released a few hundred, a dozen of which had come to Larry's rescue. All this took time.

But in the end it was done. And one night the greatest and strangest wedding in all history took place. It was attended by a half million birds of monstrous size, from whose lips came the most thrilling music ever heard. The wedding was tele-cast by the groom's best man, or rather one of them. The second stood at his side. And five billion people saw the tele-cast.

Corono stepped to Forgan's side after the wedding. The two men—the first thing Corono had done on their return was change Forgan back to his human form again—watched the honeymoon ship take off.

"Y'know, pal," Forgan said. "Pretty-puss wasn't a bad guy."

"No, he wasn't," Corono said. A sigh escaped him.

"What's wrong, pal?" Forgan asked.

"Strange, but in all the time I've been on this Earth, there has been one thought in my mind. To see a ball game. But always something prevented it."

"Well, pal," Forgan said gleefully. "Let's go! Them Bums is playing. And what bums they is...."

THE END

HYPERSPACE

By CHARLES
RECOUR

THE CONCEPT of hyperspace, used with such fascinating and interesting results in science-fiction, is not exactly a stranger to the real world of mathematics. In fact the geometries devised by the fertile brains of nineteenth-century geometers frequently are as mad and as weird as anything thought up by the casual speculator. The strange analysis of projective geometry and the even more astonishing paradoxes of topology leave a track that even an s-f fan would recognize as fabulous.

The hyperspace of science fiction is constructed by an analogy. Our everyday world is a three-dimensional continuum, the philosophers assure us, and mathematics bears out this picture of a frame of space carried by three coordinates, a set of axes all at right angles to each other. Since relativity introduced the fourth coordinate of time, interesting changes have been made, but the time-dimension doesn't change the other three! Hyperspace is the continuum built by imagining an axis at right angles to the other three!

That this is a physical impossibility is no deterrent to drawing analogies. We can't visualize this strange setup, but we can draw on the familiar comparisons of

three-space to imagine what the rich world of hyperspace would be like. For example, there is the familiar analogy of a person passing *through* a solid wall without injury to himself or the wall, by comparison with the fact that on a sheet of paper you can cross a line by simply lifting the point of the pencil up and over the line. Thus you "cross" the line without disturbing it.

Such analogies exist by the hundreds. Their reality or lack of reality in pseudo-worlds like hyperspace have no bearing on the matter. It is not beyond conception that such a world might exist, though certainly there is no physical evidence to assure it.

Mathematics cannot say anything about hyperspace, since mathematics is not a referent for reality. It is simply a way of thinking, a way of selecting rules and elements and constructing logical systems.

Physics is equally helpless to deny hyperspace's existence. Such a space would not be inconceivable to a physicist. He can perfectly imagine a physical world in which physical laws might be changed, but they would still be laws. Judging from what has come out of the ideas of gravity, there could very well be a hyperspace beyond space.

THE AGE OF TURBINES

By PAUL TATE

AFTER THE initial fanfare, the enthusiasm engendered by the promise of the gas turbine for ordinary vehicles like cars and trucks quieted down, and you haven't seen much about them. But behind the scenes the industrial developers have been vigorously at work and periodically a report creeps out about the successful operation of such a machine, a machine it would be wise to become familiar with, since it is destined to be the prime mover of most rolling equipment in the very near future.

The gas turbine for vehicles has been having the bugs knocked out of it, one by one. In principle the gas turbine simply burns a gas in a rocket-like combustion chamber, and this gas sweeps through another chamber containing turbine blades like a water wheel. The result is furious power with nothing but rotation—no jerky pistons, cylinders, etc. Nothing but simple, smooth rotation, with little wear and no vibration. The bugs have been few but difficult to conquer by reason of the turbine's basic operation. First, it uses hot gases against metal, and it's tough to make metals able to take this treatment.

They've done that pretty well by now, through experience with jet planes and rocket motors.

The terrific rotary speed of the gas turbine has been another stumbling block. Gearing it down to operate ordinary wheels and gears has been hard, but that, too, has finally succumbed. A loud, whining, grating noise has accompanied such high-speed combustion. Suitable muffling devices have licked that. The only remaining bug amounting to much is the problem of high fuel consumption. Study of burning processes is slowly beating that. The gas turbine is ready to roll!

In fact, it is rolling. There are a number of trucks and automobiles here in America and in Europe using the gas turbine. Primarily they are just research tools, but they've shown that the gas turbine is a satisfactory prime mover and the future is going to bring their muffled whine. Hot-rod enthusiasts will miss the thumping beat of piston engines. The gas turbine's here to stay—with a vengeance. Twenty years from now people will wonder what a piston engine was like, because they'll never have seen one.

WHO'LL DO THE DIRTYWORK?

By WALT CRAIN

SEVERAL economists and historians have suggested that, with education and training becoming so widespread, and with the simplification of modern industry, it will soon be hard to find people "who will do the dirty work", the hard unremitting toil like mining coal or metals, working in steel mills, handling garbage, etc. As an illustration, they recite the woes of Great Britain's coal-mining industry, which can't dig enough coal because miners are changing so rapidly to healthier and more pleasant jobs.

This is a false view of things, which doesn't take into account the fact that the so-called dirty jobs have been changing rapidly into something which is no longer strictly "dirty". That is, machinery and improved social responsibility have begun to render these very tough jobs susceptible to handling by the average human being. For example, mining machinery is completely altering the complexion of work underground. Naturally mining will never be a delightful job, but it is a lot different from the task it was twenty years ago. Furthermore, specifically in coal mining, methods are being worked out whereby, for the most part, the coal will never leave the mine. Gasification processes can accomplish this.

In addition to the widespread general

use of machinery, requirements for the more difficult jobs, the so-called "dirty" ones, are changing to the point where skilled labor is actually needed. Also, the pay in such jobs has gone up proportionally, and it is now evident to everyone that the jobs involving manual skills and labor may be more rewarding—or, at any rate, remunerative—than those of the white-collar variety.

As a consequence, there is a very clear trend discernible throughout the United States; as automatic machinery assumes more and more of the laborious and thought-consuming tasks, people will turn toward service industries as a way of making a living. This is noticeable now, although war work has cut it down somewhat. Large numbers of people have drifted into jobs involving food, entertainment, personal services, and maintenance.

In any event, civilization's dirty work will get done. Two thousand years ago slaves did it. Twenty or thirty years ago economic conditions forced us all to do it. Now machinery is taking over the burden and the day of the robot has arrived, even if he doesn't look like a metal human being! Electricity and metal can replace muscle and routine brainwork. Soon the time is coming when human beings won't have to do a job unless they like it!



The whip was a live thing — cutting, tearing

People all over the world were vanishing. Noonan went out to find them. Then he met a man named Carbert and wished he could disappear himself

EYE OF MEDUSA

**By
Charles
Creighton**

"I 'LL BE hanged if I know what to do about it!" Dale Redding's voice was low with despair.

"The head of the Bureau is on my tail night and day, wanting to know why we haven't done anything about it. Wanting to know why, with the best agents and resources in the world, we can't get to the bottom of this mystery. And it's getting worse daily."

Joan Savage crooked an eyebrow at Redding. She had known that the call from the chief had to do with the mystery called "The Singing Voices", but that was all. Nor did she understand why Tom Noonan was called in. Tom was a well-known physicist. And also, a member of the inner Bureau



of Investigation. She tried to catch Noonan's eye but he was all attention to what the boss was saying.

"I'll sum the thing up in a few words and from then on you two are on your own. Asking for data will do no good. You can read the papers and learn as much as we know here.

"It started a couple of months back. In China, of all places. A town called Husing was suddenly decimated of every living being. It took a week or so before the news reached the world, and the world paid little attention. Then a town in India lost its population. But everyone, man, woman and child. They simply disappeared, as if in air. The Lord knows when we would have learned of that because this town was in the foothills of the Himalayas and pretty remote from civilization. But as luck would have it it was the starting point of an expedition to climb Everest. And the expedition had a transmitting set.

"This is the message their contact in Delhi got: 'They are louder tonight, the singing voices. All around us. The hills echo with the sound. louder—louder. Stop them, someone!'

Redding's voice died off. He sighed deeply and made an arch of his fingers.

Tom Noonan leaned his arms on the desk, quirked an eyebrow in Redding's direction and said:

"Just the answer to a couple of questions and I'll be on my way. Are animals affected by these voices from the air? Is there a record of buildings' being destroyed by them?"

"The answer to both is no! Just people are affected. Or whatever you can call it. They just disappear."

"And one question from me," Joan said. "Where was it heard from next?"

"A town called Jernville, Nebraska," came the astounding answer.

"But I thought Jernville was one of the last to..." Joan began.

"No!" Redding broke in. "We kept the news quiet. And believe me, it was a darned hard thing to do. But that's where I came in. And from that day to this I have got just this much info on it." He snapped his fingers to illustrate how much.

Noonan shook his head twice as if satisfied with what he heard, rose, and said:

"Well, Joan. Might as well get going. Thanks, chief. We'll keep contact."

"Right," Redding said. "Whatever you may need is yours for the asking, including the army, navy and air forces."

TOM NOONAN drained the last of the coffee and peered over the edge of the cup at the lovely face across from him. Joan Savage looked like anything but a Service agent. She might have, with proper make-up, been taken for a movie starlet, so lovely was she. But Tom knew that loveliness was a stock in trade for her. Many a hoodlum, many a man wanted by the government had been taken in by those sweet features to his regret.

"Well, Joan," he said. "What's on that mind of yours?"

"I'd like to know why you asked Dale Redding those questions."

"Well," Noonan said. "To another like myself what Dale answered would immediately eliminate certain theories. Now only humans have been affected by these sounds. Therefore the pitch has been aimed directly for the human senses. Understand, since you aren't a physicist I'll use simple terminology. For instance, there is a theory that the entire Universe is vibration. If, for another example, a certain note or chord, or even sound,

struck which would match the dominant vibration which holds the Universe together, it would fall to pieces. You've heard of how a singer has hit a note that shattered a glass nearby? Or better, you've probably seen one of those soundless whistles used for the calling of pets. Well, since those voices affect only humans, I have a basis for theorizing."

Joan shook her head. Theorizing! Oh, fine! There were some thirty towns in the world which had felt the terror, and Noonan was going to theorize. Still, she thought further, it was as good a way to begin as any other.

Noonan went on: "We've gone through the files and found what? A single dominating note. The voices are always heard some time before they do their work. Sometimes the phenomenon occurs a few days before, sometimes a couple of hours before. But always there is a sort of warning. In India it was obvious a time lapse of several days went by. Which brings up your question. I think I know why you asked it, but tell me anyway."

"I wanted to see if there was a pattern from which the sounds emanated," Joan replied. "China, India, and then, of all places, a town in Nebraska. Now that last doesn't make sense."

"Does any of it?" Noonan asked. "I looked up Husing. It too was in the foothills of the Himalayas and not too far from the Indian border. It is the seat of a famous Lama, as is the town in India. But surely..." She stopped and looked sharply at the girl. "I think you and I are going to take a trip, Joan," he went on.

She beat him to the punch. "I know. To Jernville, Nebraska...."

GORDON, NEBRASKA was a shining mark on the surface of the hot prairie land. Its streets were im-

maculate, its stores were well-kept and its people looked prosperous. The bus station was one of the joys of Gordon. Not on the railroad main line, it was on a main highway, however, and all the transcontinental busses stopped there. Four people got off the Trailways Bus whose tickets had read Gordon. Mr. and Mrs. Smith were enveloped by their relatives awaiting their arrival. But not a person took notice of the tall, lean-looking man and the pretty girl who were the other two passengers.

The girl stepped out into the street and signalled a cab and directed the driver to take her to a hotel. The man checked his bags and found a seat in the coffee shop adjoining the station. He ordered lunch, found a paper in which he became engrossed and read until he was through with his meal. By that time he was alone but for one of the porters at the other end of the counter.

The waitress came over and asked if he wanted dessert.

"Nope," Tom Noonan said. "That was just right. I'll tell you what, though, miss. Maybe you could help me out....?"

"Maybe," the girl was noncommittal. She wasn't sure. He looked like a nice guy but all wolves did not wear the same fur....

"I'm looking for a man. Friend of mine. Been a number of years since I've seen him. Lived in a place called Jernville. And near as I can figure out, Jernville's a couple miles west of here. He used to be," Tom hurried on before she could break in, "a religious guy. Stayed in some sort of monastery...."

"Oh-h!" the girl was relieved. "Sure. That goofy cult they used to have out in Jernville. But it ain't there no more. Least there ain't nobody in the joint."

Tom's breath came a bit more quickly. The hunch he had back in Washington was playing out right.

"How do you mean?" he asked.

She leaned forward a bit, her brown eyes serious suddenly, and said:

"Look, mister! I don't know what happened to those people from Jernville. Nobody does. They had all kinds of reporters out here after the F. B. I. let them come in, and they couldn't find a thing. But if you ask me, and you did, I got an idea."

"So-o?" Tom let the word drop gently.

"I don't know what this monastery thing you were talking about is," the girl continued. "But they had a guy out there, some sort of doctor, who had a place in the country he used to get all kinds of queer-looking characters come out to see him.

"He was in here one night, with one of his screwy friends. It was kinda late and they had a booth and I was waiting on them. Heck! I couldn't help overhearing them. I don't know what they were talking about. One thing they said made sense to me, though. Doc Carbert, that's his name, said, '...Vibration can be controlled. I tell you the world is ours....' Gee! But that Carbert was a spooky-looking guy."

Tom felt a vast elation. Could it be his hunch was going to pan out to the fullest? He asked for and got, directions as to where he could find Carbert's place, though the girl thought he was no longer there.

THE MANY-GABLED house was set back off the road some hundred feet, and was almost entirely closed in by giant elms. Had she not given Tom minute directions, he would never have found the house. He parked the rented car in the driveway and strolled up to the house and

up the three steps to the porch. There was an old-fashioned knocker at the side of the door and he punched at it several times.

He listened intently for the space of several seconds and, not hearing the sounds of footsteps, was about to turn away, when the door opened a crack.

"Ye-es...." a deep voice inquired.

"Doctor Carbert?" Tom asked, returning to stand before the door, yet in such a way as to appear not too curious as to who was behind it.

"What do you want?" the voice asked. The door did not open further.

"I would like to speak to Doctor Carbert," Tom insisted.

"Let him in, Goro," another voice called.

The door swung wide and light streamed out into the shade of the porch. Tom's eyes went wide at sight of the man confronting him. The man was fully seven feet tall, with shoulders three feet across and a head *which came to a point!* Then Tom's glance fell on the man behind the apparition and he knew he was facing the mysterious Doctor Carbert.

Carbert had a lean, smiling face. But the smile only went as far as the lips. The eyes were cold, unswerving in their regard.

Tom stepped past the giant and a cold chill raced down his spine as he heard the door close behind him. Carbert was dressed in a long white laboratory apron. He motioned with a polite gesture for Tom to precede him.

"My office is just down the hall," Carbert said.

Tom didn't know what to expect. But Carbert's office surprised him. It was simply furnished and free of impedimenta. As a scientist, Tom could appreciate the uncluttered effect and

the functional use of what he saw.

"Now then," Carbert began as he sat at the desk and motioned Tom to take the seat alongside, "what can I do for you, sir?"

"To tell you the truth," Tom leaned forward, his voice troubled, "I don't know. I'm looking for my brother. Bill Noonan. He wrote me some months back that he was working on something with you. I don't know what it was but his letter seemed filled with mystery. Then I didn't hear from him any more. Next thing I knew there was this business of people disappearing from Jernville. So I came down here and someone told me about your place...."

"They did?" Carbert's voice rose. "How interesting. What did they say about my place?"

"Well...." Tom hesitated.

"Did they tell you I ran a mad-house?" Carbert went on.

"Why, no!" Tom's voice held horror in it.

"I used the vulgar expression: We call it sanitorium, of course. But I don't recall a Bill Noonan, though there might have been such a one here. However, Mr. Noonan, I must express my disbelief of your story. You see, no one sends a letter unless it is passed on by me. Perhaps it were best you give me the real reason for coming here."

"Okay, doc," Noonan grinned broadly. "I'm doing a story on the disappearance of Jernville's people. And I heard about this cult or whatever it is you're running here. And I thought maybe we could get together."

"So you came with this cock and bull story, eh? Not bad inventiveness. I'm sorry, but I'm afraid we can't get together...." Carbert said gently.

Tom rose and started to move away

but halted at Carbert's next words; "And I must also inform you that you are not free to leave. I do not believe your second invention either. Goro!" The door to the inner office opened and Goro strode in.

"Now wait a minute, Carbert," Tom began. But before he could go on Goro pounced on him.

Tom caught the giant's movement from the corner of an eye, whirled and struck a quick, sharp judo blow. It would have incapacitated an ordinary man. Not Goro, though. He didn't even flinch. Then his arms were wrapped around Tom's middle, pinioning his arms to his sides. Goro lifted Tom up and growled:

"What now, master?"

"Room nine," Carbert said. "And fasten the leg irons on him. I'll see him later."

WHAT A DOPE I was, Tom Noonan berated himself, as he shuffled the length of the chain attached to his ankles. It's a good thing Joan and I separated. He was on the first floor of the rambling old house, in a room on a long corridor. The room held a bed, a chair and a dresser. There was but a single window, closed and barred, and the chain had been stapled into the wall in such a way that whoever was at the end of it could not quite reach the window.

Hmm, he thought. This Carbert was a queer fish all right. But queer as he was what had he to do with the disappearance of several hundreds of thousands of people? Further, if he had something to do with it, how did he manage it?

Goro had fastened the leg irons to the wall and left him. A half hour passed, a half hour in which Tom had time to think, but not enough time to make head or tail of the mystery. His speculation was cut short by the door opening.

"Well, my friend," said Carbert as he stepped over the threshold and moved to the chair, "how goes it?"

Tom moved the length of the chain and found he was still some three feet short of the chair.

"If you have any idea of committing mayhem forget about it. Besides, I am in no mood for foolishness. I want the answer to one question. Why did you come here?"

"Fair enough," Tom said. "I'll give you the answer to that if you answer one for me."

"Goro!" Carbert suddenly was erect and the smiling cheerfulness was no longer on his lips. A snarl that was like an animal's twisted the thin lips. The giant strode into the room. A whip was curled about his right forearm and he was stripped to the waist. "This fool no longer amuses me," Carbert said. "Give him three lashes. His tongue needs loosening."

The whip coiled and lashed out and the shock and burn of the first strike made stars explode before Tom's eyes. Flame rode a fiery course down the length of his body. Again the whip snapped its deadly hissing sound as Goro struck again. This time he brought a groan of sharp disbelief from the stricken man, a sound which was forced by sheer agony from Tom's lips.

The third hissing snarl ended in a low sound of horror, a sobbing note.... Tom had never imagined pain so intense. He staggered backward and leaned against the wall, breathing heavily. After a while he took breath and sighed deeply.

"Wha-what do you want?" he asked.

"Who sent you here? What do you know?" Carbert demanded.

"No one sent me here," Tom answered. "And I don't know anything. Wait!" he shouted as Carbert turned his head toward Goro.

"Wait! I'm telling the truth. I *don't* know anything! But I guessed at some things. Maybe my guess was wrong...." he paused, his breath coming quick and fast and the sweat running down his face in tiny rivulets. He wasn't afraid of the whip, punishing though it was. It was the sheer pleasure in Carbert's eyes as Goro did the whipping which made him sick. Carbert was sadist enough to let a man be whipped to death....

"Go on!" Carbert said. "Let me hear the rest."

"...I figured these people didn't disappear into thin air, they must have gone some place. And somebody made them go there. It wasn't hard to make the first step. Jernville isn't that big a place. I figured it had to be somebody around Jernville who had the opportunity. Everybody in Gordon knows that you have queer characters visiting you. So I came here."

Carbert passed a hand across his cheek in a reflective gesture. In all probability, Carbert thought, *this* was the true story. But true or otherwise, this man could not leave. The underground laboratory must never be brought to the attention of the world. Further, the experiments were not yet complete, excellent as the results had been. Full control had not been established.

"You were quite right in the guessing game you played," Carbert said at last. "I am responsible for the disappearance of the people of Jernville and of other places you know nothing of. Further, I am going to show you my workshop—Goro! Bring him to the laboratory."

SCIENTIST though Noonan was, there were machines, tubes, electrical elements, and apparatus altogether foreign to him. The place was immense, a vast underground vault, or better, Tom thought, catacomb, of

activity. There were dozens of men busily engaged at the machines and apparatus. An unearthly and frightening silence filled the vast room. When the steel door which was the entrance closed behind Tom, he felt as if it had closed behind him forever.

The shackles were still about his ankles, though he wore no other bonds. The three, Goro, Tom and Carbert, paused just past the threshold for a moment. Then one of the aproned figures spotted Carbert and motioned for him to step to the other's side.

"Get him over to the corner out of harm's way," Carbert said to Goro. "I see Gromer wants me."

From the number of side glances the workers sent in Tom's direction, he guessed that prisoners were an oddity here. He also wondered why Carbert had brought him down into his secret web from which he spun his terror for the world. Tom could only reason it out that, like all megalomaniacs, Carbert had to show his power to someone entirely unaware of it. These down here knew what was being done...

What the man called Gromer had to say did not take long. It was also pleasing to Carbert. A broad smile showed it, as he came back to stand at Tom's side.

"Good news?" Tom asked.

"The best. Gromer thinks he has solved the mystery of the positive-direction finder. If he has... Aah! If he has, the world will soon hear of me. Although the world may not be pleased with what I have to tell it. We thought we had it solved when we sent the sound waves at Jernville and the vibration evaporated the human flesh as the rain is made to evaporate by the sun. But it was sheer accident. Later tests proved it. Now, Gromer says, we can beam the waves to any particular spot, with the same ease

and with the same surety that it will strike, as when a gunner sets his sights on a stationary target."

There it was, Tom thought. The whole thing. A machine which set up vibrations to correspond to the molecular vibrations of the human structure. Swifter than light, impossible to trace, and worse, impregnable to attack. A large-enough machine could depopulate the world in a matter of minutes. Tom paled as these thoughts sped through his mind. Somehow, he had to escape this prison and bring force to this house of terror.

"Come, my friend," Carbert said, taking Tom's arm. "Let me show you the joy of my life."

With the giant on one side and Carbert on the other Tom was escorted through the long corridor and its many branches while Carbert explained in technical terminology what the various machines were and their uses. Some Tom had knowledge of, others were a mystery to him. When the tour was over he instructed Goro to take Tom back to his room and bring him food.

"...I like this one," Carbert said. "He listens well. Perhaps I will find some use for him."

THE MOON sent a fitful light through the barred window. Goro had allowed Tom, on instructions from Carbert, the freedom of the room. But the leg irons were still clamped firmly about Tom's ankles. They made him a prisoner as surely as if they were still attached to the staple in the wall.

Tom had tried the bars, the door, had tapped the walls, had done everything in his power to find a means of escape. But in the end he had had to admit frustration. He had noticed that Goro carried a bunch of keys attached to his belt. But there it was again. A way out, if only he could

surmount the barrier of the giant's strength.

Goro had left to prepare Tom's dinner. A half hour had passed. The sound of the door's opening heralded Goro's return. Tom had to admit that Carbert served good food to his prisoners, if what he had had was a sample. As he finished his last mouthful the way to freedom presented itself. The fork. If he could only sneak it away without Goro's catching on, why it would be a matter of minutes and he would be free.

The napkin solved the problem. Tom dropped it deliberately. And as he stooped with one hand outstretched for the cloth, his other hand was busy-ing itself in concealing the fork. Goro, like the audience watching a magician, was looking only at the hand reaching for the napkin. When Tom threw it over the tray Goro assumed the utensils were all under it.

It took a bit longer than he thought it would. He almost had the problem of loosening his bonds solved when he had to hide the fork. The sound of footsteps just outside the door warned him in time. This time it was Carbert, himself, who had come to call. And as the light blossomed in the room Tom paled at the blazing madness in Carbert's eyes.

The doctor's body was bent slightly from the waist. His mouth was twisted in a thin line of vicious intent. "Spying, eh?" Carbert snarled. "So you thought you could get away with it? The girl in the shadows and you here. But you forgot about a woman's curiosity. You didn't think she would come here, did you? But she did. So you, as well as she, must suffer. A nice dish, the girl. I feel the need of a woman's companionship sometimes. And the cows of the village were somehow never satisfying. Miss Savage has

something. Aah! I think I am going to like her...."

Tom lunged the length of the chair. But it was short a foot or so of reaching his goal. The blow he aimed at Carbert was not even close. Carbert laughed aloud in a high-pitched voice which made Tom suddenly aware of something. The man was mad. Insane!

"Goro," Carbert called in a thin voice, a voice edged with a peculiar tone, an expectant tone, a tone which held hidden nuances of delights to be. "Goro," Carbert continued when the giant appeared, the whip coiled about his arm. "Strip him to the waist and lash him, until I tell you to stop...."

TOM LOST track of lashes after the tenth. Pain became a something impersonal, his body a something which did not belong to him, flesh that no longer held the power to give the hideous pain on being struck. He no longer was aware of anything, that he was lying on the floor and that Goro had stopped swinging the lash and that Carbert was standing over him.

"Bah! The girl was soft," Carbert spoke, half to himself and half to Goro. "But that is to be expected of a woman. Her flesh and will were weak. But this one. I thought he would hold out longer. Ah, well. He will live for another day's entertainment. Then—Let us go now, Goro. I have some things to talk over with my technicians."

THERE WAS the sound of a voice. A woman's voice. Joan's voice. It was calling to him. "Get up!" the voice said. "Get up! Don't lie there. You *must* get up!" He stirred and rolled over and exquisite pain rolled over him, as if he had twisted into a bed of lava. He sighed, no longer even

able to bring out the scream which echoes pain. Then he managed to sit up and after a while to struggle to his feet. Every movement was unbearable torture, but his will was stronger than anything. His will and the terrible driving force which had suddenly become an integral part of him. Carbert and Goro. They were to pay for what they had done to him. His brain was afire.

The fork! It was still in his trouser pocket. His fingers trembled as they closed on it. The key which was to bring freedom to him. Freedom and vengeance. Tom did not know it but he was in the midst of delirium brought on by the sheer pain of the torture he had undergone. Had he been in his right mind he would not have tried to do what he was attempting.

The shackles made no sound as he laid them tenderly on the floor. Then he broke off two of the tines on the fork, leaving only the center one. The fork had served him well, opening the lock to the shackles. Now it was going to be a weapon to him.

The door opened on well-oiled hinges. The long corridor was dark. Like an animal prowling for prey, Tom moved. There were doors to either side of the corridor. Tom paused before each door, stooped and placed his ear to the key hole. Nothing. There were nine doors. And not even the sound of breathing could be detected.

The last door left him at the head of the stairs. They were carpeted, making an effective cover for the sound of footsteps. Once more the round keyhole listening went on. Nothing. Reason finally broke through. Tom remembered the number of men he had seen at work in the underground laboratory. There were too many for the number of rooms in the

house itself. Then he also remembered the size of the place below and understood where they were kept.

There were stairs leading to the underground workshop. But the door to it was locked. Tom cursed the luck. There was but one place where he might find a key. The doctor's office. Back he went. The door was open to his gentle pull. And once more luck was against him. But he found something in the desk which was as important, a .38, a loaded one.

Tom went back to the head of the stairs and tried to use the single-tined fork on the lock. But it didn't take more than a few seconds for him to realize that he was working against insurmountable odds. This lock wasn't the simple mechanism of the shackles.

He caught the faint sound of feet coming up the stairs just as he tried to insert the tine for the last time. It took only an instant for the decision. The gun remained in the waistband of his trousers as he flattened himself against the side wall. Then the door opened and Goro strode past Tom.

The only sound the giant made as the tine tore a gaping hole in his jugular was a sighing sob. Then the spouting fountain of blood choked all other sounds deep in his throat. Goro's fall was muffled by the thick carpet. And this time the .38 came into the open as Tom descended the stairs. Goro hadn't even had time to close the door, so swiftly had death struck.

THE MISTS which had closed on Tom's mind with the advent of the torture were clearing now. The sight of the winding stairs cleared it entirely. Caution came to him. Joan was somewhere in the depths below. But she was not alone. Carbert was there also. And the dozen or so of his minions. And Tom had more than

a suspicion that they could prove to be as deadly as he.

Tom remembered that there had been a series of doors leading off the bottom of the staircase. And after them there was the barred gate to the laboratory itself. The gate and what lay behind it brought another problem to mind. For if it came to a showdown, which was to be first, Joan or the vibration machines? Of course there was but one answer. The same answer if conditions were such that Joan was in his spot.

He crouched against the wall and pondered his position. It seemed as if there wasn't a single chance of his gaining his ends. The gate at the end of this corridor was barred and entrance could not be gained without a key. And Carbert held that. Damn Carbert, Tom growled to himself. He was a demon, a devil incarnate.

And the doorway to Hades opened and Carbert stood revealed in profile to Tom. Tom made himself as inconspicuous as possible. But Carbert's attention was on something in the room he was just quitting.

"... I will be back soon, my dear," Tom heard him say. "I like your spirit. But do not show me too much of it. Just enough to whet my appetite."

Then the door closed and Carbert was advancing toward the stair. Too late Carbert saw the trap had stepped into. His hands went slowly above his head as Tom rose before him.

"Okay!" Tom said. "Back into the lady's room."

Joan whirled at the sound of the door's opening. Her eyes went wide at sight of Tom Noonan. She was not chained as Tom had been. But she was just as much a prisoner as had her companion been. The door to her

room had a lock which could only be opened from the outside.

"Tom!" she called in relief. "I—I was so afraid."

But Tom, after a single glance to see that she had been unharmed, paid no heed to the girl. He nudged Carbert forward with the gun until Carbert stood almost against the wall at the far end of the room.

"Joan," Tom said. "He's got the keys to the laboratory in the rear pocket of his trousers. Get them." He waited until she did his bidding, then continued: "One of those keys is to the laboratory. We've got to destroy every tube in there. Without the tubes the machines are useless. The gate opens without sound so you won't be stymied in that direction. But there's bound to be some noise of glass breaking. Do it quickly and get back here. I think the good doctor values his skin pretty highly. If any harm comes to you, he'll suffer—"

He heard the door close behind her, shook his head in satisfaction, and said:

"All right, Carbert. Turn around."

FOR A LONG moment the two faced each other in silence. Then Carbert gave his crooked grin and said:

"Just what do you expect to gain? Goro will soon be back. He can be a vicious creature when enraged. I warn you! He is completely dedicated to me."

"Don't bother about Goro," Tom said. "He has run his last errand for you."

A string of obscenities streamed from Carbert's lips at the news of Goro's death. This time it was Tom who grinned.

"Save it," Tom suggested.

Carbert's breath came pantingly. His eyes roved from one side to an-

other like an animal trapped in a cage. "The noise of the glass breaking will awaken everyone," Carbert said. "They will catch the girl. Neither of us can leave this room. She has the keys, remember? They will break in. And when they do there will be little left of you. Perhaps enough, if I can stop them, to give me some amusement."

"Keep one thing in mind, Carbert," Tom said coldly. "I still have the gun. There are six cartridges in it. I don't have to kill you. . . ." He left the rest unsaid. And Carbert went pale at the implication.

Time went by. There wasn't the least sound from beyond the door. It was as if Joan had disappeared into thin air. Tom felt sweat form on his chest, at the corners of his temples, at the back of his neck, felt the drip of it down his body. And Carbert too knew the torture of waiting. And suddenly Carbert's eyes went wide in terrible fright. He remembered something.

"The vibro-tube!" he shouted. "If she smashes that the whole place will go sky high!"

"Then let it go sky high," Tom said.

And once more the agony of waiting, this time with a double-edged sword in the knowledge that at any instant they would die, horribly.

Their heads came up together at the confused sounds of shouting voices from behind the closed door. Then the clear voice of Joan:

"Tom! Get out!"

"They have her!" Carbert exulted.

And Tom hit him with the barrel of the gun without the slightest compunction. Carbert fell without a sound.

There was the metallic sound of a key at the door and after a second the slide of the bolt. By that time

Tom had flattened himself by the side of door. It opened with a crash and three men piled through. They were carrying crowbars. But Tom moved with a speed greater than theirs. He was through the door and into the corridor before they could do more than realize he was free.

There were three others in the corridor. Two of them held Joan prisoner while the third waited for his companions in the room. Tom recognized him as the man who had called Carbert aside. Tom's finger curled around the trigger and three shots blazed their orange spit toward the three.

Joan leaped forward, her voice breathless in anxiety:

"Quickly. I smashed the whole place to bits. Let's get out of here."

But Tom had forgotten for the one fateful instant the three who had charged into the room. They proved his undoing. He whirled, his left hand pulling at Joan, felt lightning strike him on the head and knew no more. . . .

"TOM, TOM," the voice implored. "Please, baby. Open your eyes."

The weights on his eyes were heavy, Tom thought. Now if he just took his time and did not try to lift them too swiftly, his eyelids might just manage to slip them off. Slowly his eyes opened. The grey dawn was slipping into the window, streaking the floor with dark bars. There was someone kneeling at his side. It took a few seconds for him to make out the shape of the person. Then the whole thing came back in a flash and he sat erect. A groan was forced from him as sudden pain jabbed the back of his head.

"Take it easy, baby," Joan counseled, as she put a soft though strong arm as support behind him. "You got an awful whack on the skull."

"Lucky it's ivory," Tom said ruefully. "How long we been here?"

"Couple of hours. I'll give you past history. I did a good job in the lab, and the first thing Carbert ordered after they brought him to was for the repair crew to get to work. Then they lugged us up here and dumped us. I think that just as soon as they fix those gimmicks in the basement they're going to fix us but good."

"They won't wait that long," Tom said. "If you broke those tubes and knocked the wiring off it's going to take maybe weeks to repair. Tubes they'd have to buy or manufacture. They don't grow on trees. What's more, Carbert knows we're Government agents. He's going to pull whatever has been on his mind, now. We're a couple of pigs waiting for the butcher's knife, Joan."

Neither had been shackled. They had been thrown into one of the rooms which could only be opened from the outside. They heard the sound of someone behind the door. She moved closer to Tom as the door opened. It was Carbert. Beside him on either side were a couple of men armed with rifles. Carbert looked as if he was possessed by the devil.

"So you thought to wreck the work of years, eh?" he asked. "But she didn't! My lucky star still gleams brightly. She smashed every tube but the right one. They were important to me and my work, but not as was the vibro-tube. Soon you will find out how important..."

Carbert jerked his arm inward in a signal and the two men with the rifles motioned for the man and woman to march through the door. Once more Tom saw the row on row of machines and tubes. But this time no one was at work on them. Instead, all the aproned technicians were standing in

a single large group behind and to one side of a complicated piece of machinery near the center of the room. A wooden barricade had been set up before the far end of the room. Tom and the girl were marched to the barricade and made to stand facing the group of people at the other end.

Carbert stepped to the side of the large piece of machinery and said, as his fingers played with the pointer of a dial near the base:

"Gromer tells me it's minimum range is ten feet, the distance you two are from the vibro-tube. Now I will set the pointer to the minimum range, ten feet, point the setting lever directly at you, set the range thusly, and in a moment, press the starting button.

"It won't take long. First you will hear the 'singing voices' and after a moment, when the voices have reached the necessary pitch, dissolution. Just like that." He stopped, sweat gleaming on his forehead, his eyes bright with maniacal fury, his lips drooling like an idiot's. "The last test. And after you two have dissolved into nothingness, I shall dictate my terms to the rest of the world, nor will they have a chance to get away. The sound of the 'singing voices' will fill the air from one end of the world to the other. You know how powerful I am, don't you, Noonan?"

Tom's voice was low and bitter in reply:

"You're not powerful, Carbert. You're crazy! Your ego will prove your undoing." But even as he said it he knew he was wrong. Yet not completely. For if Carbert could lose so great a vibration on the world, he himself, and all his companions, would die in the same way. For he would have to set the machine to its farthest point. And assuming... Tom caught himself. No! Carbert was

right! They had managed to do just that. There was that Indian town and Husing in China.

"Crazy...?" Carbert snarled. "Not I! But those who reject my terms will be. But I am wasting time. The test. First to see how exact is the range finder on the machine. And you two are the range. Listen...."

THEY SAW Carbert's fingers tighten on the control, saw him move the pointer up from zero to ten, and Tom's arm went around Joan's waist in futile protection. "I love you," he whispered, as a low hum became evident. "It's a hell of a time to tell you, but I haven't been able to before. I love you...."

The hum became louder, and Tom waited in horror for the promised sound of the 'singing voices'. But only the hum persisted. The man and woman standing with their backs against the wall saw what took place, in horrified wonder.

As if the legs of those in the group behind the machine had turned to water, as if a liquid death had become their bath, so did they die. There wasn't even a moist spot where they had stood, to mark their passing....

Carbert turned his head slowly, at the odd looks on the faces of the man and woman. They could not see the transfiguration which took place. But they could see him stiffen. Some sixth sense, some instinct with which man is provided and which come to him in moments of stress, came to Tom just then. He leaped forward at a dead run as Carbert whirled toward the tube.

"Then we all die!" Carbert screamed aloud, as he swung his fist at the tube.

Tom dove in a headlong football tackle from three feet off. He hit Carbert just below the waist and

knocked him sprawling away from the tube. Carbert was possessed of a thousand furies. He fought tooth, nail and claws at the man atop him. Time after time Carbert raked his nails across Tom's cheek until the blood streamed from the ribbed scratches. Once, while they were tumbling back and forth Carbert managed to drive a knee into the pit of Tom's stomach. But Tom had but one thought and goal in mind. A judo blow at the side of Carbert's throat.

Then Carbert got his hooking fingers around Tom's throat. The mad doctor's face was inches from Tom's own. Saliva dripped from the open mouth of the madman onto Tom's face. That horrible mouth was making sounds which were sheer horror to hear. But it wasn't the sounds which were losing the battle for Tom. It was those fingers squeezing the life out of him. If only he could free himself of their grip before unconsciousness took him.

Streaks of darkness came and went before Tom's eyes. He knew they were the first signs of death. His breath was like fire in his throat. He struck at the face so close to him, with blows that had lost their effectiveness. It was only a matter of time, time which was running short. Tom's eyes rolled in their sockets, his arms went wide along the floor. Perhaps it was that, perhaps Carbert felt a surge of triumph. Whatever it was, Carbert permitted his grip to relax for an instant. It was the instant Tom had been waiting for. His arms swept in, palms stiff in a judo blow, a judo blow which caught Carbert on both sides of the neck. A strangled cry escaped Carbert. And Tom struck again.

This time there was a startling crack of sound, a crack which spelled the breaking of bone. Carbert's head fell backward with a sickening thud.

It was the kind of sound only the dead make in final relaxation.

"TELL ME, Joan," Dale Redding asked. "What did you do to the tube?"

Once more Tom Noonan and Joan Savage were facing their chief in his office. They were seated side by side, their fingers entwined.

"Well, it was a lot easier than you imagine," the girl replied. "Carbert was an egomaniac. I played on his ego. What Tom did not know and what Carbert did not think it necessary to tell, was that he had taken me also, for a trip to his underground laboratory. I acted as if the man was a genius, which he was.

"Tom had explained some of the mystery of vibration to me. I knew that one of the machines was the one which sent out the sound called the 'singing voices'. I asked which machine did this wonderful work and of course Carbert explained it to me. So when I got back to the lab, I left the tube alone: I had an idea that it had some hidden power which would wreck

everything. But I reversed the dial on it. It was really simple...."

"You make it sound that way," Redding said, grinning broadly. "So when he set it in motion, the technicians, supposedly standing out of harm's way, were really in focus, as it were. Aah, well. I for one am glad it's all over. And now, children. I have another job for the two of you—"

"You do?" Tom said, as he rose, taking Joan along with him. "That's too bad. It's just going to have to wait until our honeymoon is over."

"Our honeymoon...?" Joan asked in surprise. "But we aren't even married."

"A small item I'm going to remedy as soon as we can get to a preacher," Tom said.

"But you haven't asked me, Tom Noonan," Joan said.

"So I'm asking."

The kiss he got for an answer satisfied him. And made promise of the more to come....

THE END

Steel That Floats

By E. BRUCE YACHES

THE METALLURGICAL world is trying every imaginable combination of metals and alloys. Industry requires such a profusion of tailor-made metals that science can afford to lose no bets in coming up with something useful. There are all sorts of new miracle metals like titanium and beryllium, but nothing is as novel or as promising in many respects as *controlled density steel*.

This new metal is an amazing example of what can be done with an old material and a new idea. Using a neat process involving powdered iron ore, coke and limestone, it is possible to make steel with a controlled density; that is, it can be made lighter than aluminum—almost as light as wood—or as heavy as ordinary steel, or to suit any value between!

The process is quite simple, bypassing

the conventional steel mill. The iron ore is pulverized, mixed with similarly pulverized coke and limestone, placed in a mold whose shape is to be reproduced, heated to 2000 degrees in an oven or furnace or by electricity, and the result is an object of steel whose density depends on the degree of compressing or compacting in the mold!

But while the process clearly goes directly from iron ore to finished product without the intermediary steps of the steel mill, naturally the process does not supplant conventional steel mills. It has limited applications; but it is one more step in a general tendency to mold or stamp materials into their finished form without a lot of machining operations in between. Above all, this particular process is important where materials are needed that are light in weight, yet have strength.

SOUND THAT STOPS A SHIP

By
SAM DEWEY

THERE ARE many misapprehensions about the nature of "the sonic barrier." This hypothetical obstruction is often thought to exist as a massive and almost impenetrable wall through which a plane or rocket flying toward the speed of sound is supposed to burst.

And of course such a thing doesn't exist!

What gives rise to the myth of the sonic barrier is a simple fact concerning high-speed flight. When aircraft approach the velocity of sound, the flow of air around their wings, around any protuberances, around the body of the ship itself, causes "shock" waves to be set up. These shock waves are not sound waves, but rather regions of highly compressed air which offer difficulty in passage and set off vibratory effects capable of shattering the plane.

Scientists confronted with this problem realize the obvious answer—eliminate the wings and protuberances. Then you have no shock waves, no sonic barrier with which to deal. Unfortunately this is not easy, because at slower speeds a sizable wing is needed to provide lift and some sort of stub wing is required even at quite high speeds, short of those associated with pure rockets.

Consequently a compromise has been effected. Small, stubby wings are invariably found on high-speed aircraft—jet jobs. But these can't be as small as the designers would like because, if they were, the plane wouldn't be able to fly at slow speeds, and its landing speed would be intolerable. The other outlet is to retain ridiculously small wings and launch the craft from another high-speed plane.

Compromising on everything, the technician makes the wings as small and as stubby as he dares—and then sweeps them back at a grotesque angle, giving a penetrative effect and enabling penetration without vibration through the sonic range.

These are the alternatives. Actually they are stop-gaps on the way to complete rocketry development. The rocket, relying solely on its tremendous thrust forces, ignores "lift" in the conventional aircraft sense, and consequently the shock problem is no problem at all. But for the time being fly-cs will slide through to supersonic speeds on swept-back wings and stubby protrusions

The Glass Age

By MERRITT LINN

"THE MORE things change, the more they remain the same," says an old French proverb, and nowhere else is this more delightfully illustrated than in a glass factory. Glass is one of Man's oldest structural materials and—in slightly different forms—one of his newest. Ancient peoples made artifacts of glass which have endured to this day completely unchanged, as beautiful and as useful today as they were twenty centuries ago.

Glass really has two aspects. Viewed from the standpoint of the artist, it is a basic art material, and a skilled glass-blower, working with a blow-pipe, a glob of molten glass and simple carbon tools can produce objects of incredible complexity and beauty. To this day there are large numbers of hand glass-blowers who are really more artists than technicians. To them glass is a magical substance capable of infinite variety—and perpetual value.

To the scientist and technician glass is a structural material so diversified in its uses that either a building or a vacuum tube may be made from it. Cheap and plentiful, it has properties that suit it to almost any situation; strength can be treated into it; it is absolutely corrosion-proof; and it is dense and impermeable. Windows, doors, bottles, structural brick, all account for the volume production of the stuff. Electron tubes, incandescent and fluorescent lamps, scientific apparatus and the like absolutely require its use.

Because its raw materials are so cheap and plentiful, more and more glass is finding its way into industrial uses. Future uses are incalculable. Buildings will be made entirely of glass, insulated with fine glass wool, and threaded through with pipes of glass. This trend is already discernible in the most modern dwellings. Glass is about as dense as aluminum and, while it is harder to work, it is so resistant to the elements that there is really no comparison between the two as far as durability goes. With the development of "tempered" glasses capable of resisting shock loads, glass is being used in places where it was once thought impracticable. The dream of a "crystalline city" common to much science fiction is reality. When they speak of "glittering towers" they are referring to towers of glass!

MAKE WAY FOR YOUR CORPSE

By Milton Lesser

MR. SLAGG took a sip of his bourbon and burped, not too politely, but that didn't make the man go away.

He said, "You're supposed to be dead, Mr. Slagg."

"Nuts," Mr. Slagg replied.

The man grunted under his breath, like Mr. Slagg often did when he was annoyed. The man had graying hair, a high, pinkish forehead, rimless hexagonal glasses, a long, big-pored nose, and a great chunk of Adam's apple on his neck.

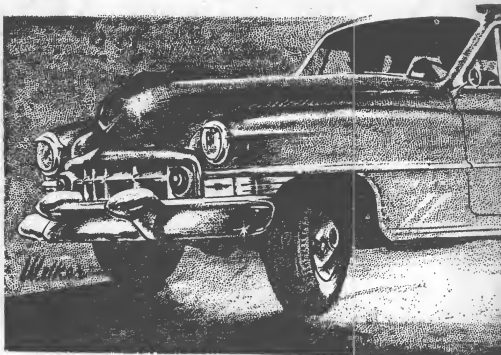
So did Mr. Slagg.

"This is a difficult situation," said the man who looked like Mr. Slagg. "You're making it more difficult because you won't listen. Shall I tell you again?"

"No. I have had too much to drink, entirely too much to drink. Please go away."

The man refused to do so. "At ten o'clock tonight—that was two hours ago—you were supposed to go home. A car that came around the corner of Main and Fetchurch was supposed to have hit and killed you."

"No, it didn't," insisted Mr. Slagg.



One Mr. Slagg went to work but two Mr. Slaggs came home. This confused Martha. She decided that (1) she was a bigamist or (2) her husband was so drunk that even his wife saw two of him



Mr. Slagg had the sudden feeling he was looking into a mirror

"Of course it didn't! You never went. You've made a horrible mess of things, Mr. Slagg, a horrible mess. You see, I'm your corpse."

"Hunh?"

"I said, I'm your corpse. But, since you're not dead, I can't be buried. I have no place to go. You've caused a horrible bottleneck—"

Mr. Slagg waved his arms in a gesture of dismissal, but he was too expressive—entirely too expressive for a time like this, and he slumped half across the bar.

The bartender sighed and, said to the man who looked like Mr. Slagg, "Better take your brother home, bud. Better take him home. He's had a few too many."

The man nodded and led Mr. Slagg out through the door and into the rain-drenched street. The two of them huddled together under the big newspaper that the man spread above their heads, but soon it became soaked and he threw it away, grunting softly to himself. Mr. Slagg grunted too. He didn't like rain.

The corner of Main and Fetchurch was deserted. "I knew it was too late," the man said. "Have you any ideas?"

MR. SLAGG was very tired, very wet, and very confused. "Let's go home," he suggested.

They hailed a cab one block up on Fetchurch and soon water slopped onto leather cushions from two soaked tweed suits. "117 Drew Street," they both said.

"Hey, wait a minute!" said Mr. Slagg. "How did you know my address?"

"Our address," the man corrected. "Although I'm the corpse in this time stream, I still know where I live."

"Where *who* lives?" Mr. Slagg was indignant.

"I—Roger Otis Slagg. Or, if you

prefer, you—Roger Otis Slagg. Us."

The cab-driver shook his head. All the windows were closed against the rain, and he sniffed at the air. He began to whistle "Show Me the Way to Go Home".

Mr. Slagg had never liked whistling, and now he felt particularly ornery. He cleared his throat to speak, first noticing the driver's name on his taxi-license. The picture showed a swarthy, thick-jowled man, and under it was the name Donald Matucci.

Mr. Slagg cleared his throat again, but his companion said:

"Please, Mr. Matucci, stop whistling."

Matucci stopped, and presently his cab arrived at 117 Drew Street. Mr. Slagg reached into his pocket for a crumpled wad of dollar bills, but the other man came up with his own money first, and soon Mr. Slagg heard Matucci whistling again as he put the cab into gear and drove off into the rain.

Show me the way to go home... but they *were* home.

Mr. Slagg called into the living room, "Oh, Martha dear. I'm home."

"Be quiet," Martha said. "I'm watching wrestling."

They came into the living room—Mr. Slagg and the man who looked like Mr. Slagg. The lights were off, but over against one wall Mr. Slagg could see the rectangle of their television screen and before it the dim bulk of his wife, Martha.

She jumped up. "Look out, Marvin, look out! That damned Balkan Bear has Marvin in a head lock. Oooh—you have a friend with you, Roger?"

"Not exactly," Mr. Slagg's companion said. "He's not a friend at all. In fact, he's a pain in the neck."

"So why'd you bring him home with you?"

"I didn't really bring him, he came."

Mr. Slagg frowned. "Now, wait a minute. Who came tagging after who, that's what I want to know. Who came tagging after who?"

"Whom," Martha corrected. "But why are you arguing with yourself, Roger?" It was then that Mr. Slagg realized his companion's voice was identical with his own.

"I am *not* arguing," Mr. Slagg insisted. "But this man claims—"

"It isn't a claim; it's a fact."

"—that I'm dead."

"You've been drinking again," Martha said coldly, flicking the light switch. Outside, the rain splattered dully against the roof, and when Martha got up to put on the light, Mr. Slagg had a quick glimpse of Marvin's head in the vise of the Balkan Bear's left arm. He was about to yell encouragement to Marvin—he was a Marvin fan too. But his companion cried:

"Give him hell, Marvin boy!"

THEN MR. SLAGG heard another cry. It came from Martha's lips, but he had never heard her scream that way before. She had begun to say, "This is outra—"

Only she never finished. Mr. Slagg saw her stare at him, and then he saw her stare at the other man.

It was at that point that she screamed, long and loud, and then her voice dribbled off and she was falling. Slowly, so slowly that Mr. Slagg thought he was watching a moving picture in slow motion. But she fell, all right, and she hit the floor with a thud.

"Fainted," muttered the man who looked like Mr. Slagg. "This is regrettable. Of course, Slagg, it's your fault. No one can blame me."

"So it's my fault," said Mr. Slagg. He went into the kitchen and got a

glass of water. Soon he came back and spilled the contents of the glass all over Martha's face. She blubbered and blinked, but when she saw the two of them bending over her, it was the same as before. Only this time she had no place to fall and thus she simply slumped back and closed her eyes again.

Mr. Slagg turned to his companion. "Go away," he pleaded. "There will be hell to pay when Martha wakes up."

The man rubbed a hand ruefully across his chin. "Don't I know it," he said.

"Well, then," Mr. Slagg insisted, "go away and I'll tell her it was her imagination."

The other smiled. "You go away."

"From my own house?" Mr. Slagg demanded indignantly.

"My house, too. Anyway, Slagg, I belong here, you don't. Actually, I should be dead. But one way or the other, I belong. And you're delaying. I warn you, you'll cause a bottleneck—"

"You said that once before," Mr. Slagg told him dryly.

"Well, it's true. Look: after you died in this time-stream, I came here as the corpse. But you were supposed to slip down to the next lowest stream, to the stream where you *didn't* get killed, and the Slagg there would slip down a notch to another stream, where something else—I don't know what—happened."

"You're drunk," suggested Mr. Slagg.

"No drunker than you. It all would have been quite clear to you if you had died on schedule. There is, of course, an infinity of possibilities. One is that you simply remained at home tonight, watching Marvin wrestle the Balkan Bull. Another—this one—you went out, had some drinks, and got

run over by a big black sedan. Only you didn't."

"I didn't," Mr. Slagg assured him. "So please go away."

"I can't. I'm the Slagg on this level now, only I should be dead. But because you didn't get run over, I'm not."

"So?" Mr. Slagg was very tired, and despite the fact that he could not understand why this man looked so much like him, he was beginning to be amused.

"So that means trouble. There are two of us and—"

"Twins," Mr. Slagg said brightly. "So we're twins. So what?"

"So—oh, go to hell!" Then the man smiled. "You really should, you know, but then, of course, it would be me, and not you. As I said, I'm the corpse. You belong some place else."

"It's raining," Mr. Slagg said defensively. "I don't want to go out."

THE MAN frowned. "Look, all you have to do is go outside and get yourself killed. It's not too much to ask. I'll be the corpse, anyway, and you'll be the same as before on one of the other levels of possibility. All you have to do, then, is go through the motions. Please."

Mr. Slagg thought of stepping in front of a car. "I won't," he said.

For a long time, the man who looked like Mr. Slagg looked at Mr. Slagg: then he shrugged. "It's useless, I suppose," he decided. "Useless."

"It is," Mr. Slagg agreed cheerfully. "So please go away."

"Okay, okay. I've no choice. I'll go back to my own level. But the Slagg there will be angry—he came down from the next highest level, of course. It'll cause a bottleneck and he'll have to go back where he came from. Then

the Slagg there—"

Mr. Slagg suddenly was very angry. "Get out!" he screamed.

"None of them will like it," the other sighed. "It will cause a great deal of confusion. None of them will like it at all—"

Mr. Slagg blinked. The man had disappeared.

In the two weeks which followed, Mr. Slagg slowly forgot the incident. That is to his credit: he slowly forgot it. It wasn't easy, not with Martha whimpering a little every time she saw him. But, by degrees, he forgot. After all, when he was drunk, a man could have hallucinations.

Now he sat in his office, considering the Chambers account with the fine-toothed comb which had made him a power in advertising.

The interoffice phone buzzed, and he pressed a button absently. "Yes?"

He heard Miss Jameson's voice, shrill and high-pitched. "I quit!" she cried. "I quit, Mr. Slagg."

"Eh? What say?" The girl was a good worker—he didn't want to lose her.

Her voice faded away from the phone, hysterical. "I—quit!"

"I'll give you a raise," he suggested. "Five dollars." But she didn't answer.

Then someone knocked on the door, and Mr. Slagg said come in. She had changed her mind, of course, and had returned to apologize.

They filed in, all of them. Endlessly, they filed in, all frowning. All with tweed suits, graying hair, high, pinkish foreheads, rimless hexagonal glasses, long, big-pored noses, great chunks of Adam's apple on their necks. He could not tell them apart, but all were very angry.

All were Mr. Slagg.

READER'S PAGE

HE LIKES US.

Dear Editor:

Thank you very much for Issue No. 11. Thought that it was simply superb!

The lead novel, "When the World Tottered", was a classic! I don't think I can say more for the masterpiece. The second best, a very close second, was "Earth-bound". I would like to see some more of Mr. Coppel's work. Third was another masterpiece, "Satellite Secret". I've read a good many yarns in my time and I usually know what to expect for an ending. But this one completely floored me. Fourth was "Hazard of Blue Gap". A hackneyed theme well used. Fifth was "To the Victors". Well told, but I seem to recall a similar sort of thing happening in many other stories. Sixth, "The Devil Finds Work". Well, I suppose I must not expect every story in one issue to be perfect. To be quite frank, this yarn gave me the pip! And now for the only rotten story in the whole issue: "Chrysalis". I will not be guilty of insulting anybody, so I will refrain from making any comment.

So much for the stories.

The illustrations on the whole were excellent, though somehow I think the Valkyries depicted on the cover had a little more clothing on than that! In the lead novel it states quite clearly, in many passages, that the hero was wearing armor, yet in the pictures he has only shirt and trousers on. How come?

Now just a small bone to pick. When you published my letter, a slip occurred somewhere, and you erroneously stated my age to be 14. At the time of writing, I am 17. I would like this made clear because I asked in my letter for pen friends, and consequently I have received vast quantities of mail from the 14-year-olds of fandom. However, I am still interested in science-fiction pen friends provided they are a little nearer my own age!

Well, I think that is all, except for one small query. When are you going to print some more of R. Bloch's stories? I am not quite sure if the man is a genius or a fugitive from a mental hospital, but his stories represent an irresistible attraction to me!

Thanking you once more for a magnificent issue,

B. King
163 Devonshire Avenue
East Southsea
Ports., Hants., England

CORRESPONDENCE INVITED

Dear LES:

Boy, what an issue this August FA turned out to be!

1) "The Man Who Lived Twice". Verrry good. Rog Phillips can work miracles—like "A More Potent Weapon". What an angle!

2) "All Flesh Is Brass". Imagine yourself in the place of the poor Replace with your chest torn away by a rocket, the springs and things protruding from the hole, and the realization that you are a metal man! Errr! A sorry short it was, but a good one.

3) "The Yellow Wind". Hmmm... I don't know. Maybe I am wrong, but the only thing I liked from this one was Spino, the Greek.

4) "Tomorrow's Shadow". If it wasn't for Rog Phillips' yarn it would take first place. Now it only goes side by side with it. And you know why? Because I've had such experiences many a time. And after much thought I reached the same solution as did the author. Just the same. And you know how comfortable it is for one's nerves to know that somebody else shares his "ridiculous" ideas.

The illustrations were nice except the one by Mendoza. The rocket ship looked like a broom without a broomstick. The best was Virgil Finlay's, of course, with the one for "All Flesh Is Brass" panting at its neck—are you sure it was drawn by Ensler?

FANTASTIC was terrific, plain terrific! And I see that the second issue will be colored on the inside too! Yipee!!

Now, my heart would get warmer if I received any letter from any fan—girl or boy. I am 16.

Thanks for reading this.

Pete Artis
Micromanis 11
Athens, Greece

(continued on page 127)



By Stuart Faulkner

HELL IS UP ABOVE

We think of hell as being down below. But hell can be anywhere — down below — up above, or, under the right circumstances, in Chicago or Keokuk; and beautiful women can be hell's demons



They knelt before the awful thing that was supreme

LIEUTENANT LARRY HIGGINS made a mental estimation of how far he would have to fall. The oxygen tank in his space suit would supply him during a hundred-mile descent—but no more than that.

In the distance he could make out other grotesque figures plunging earthward. He felt at the gun at his hip and peered downward again, es-

timating that he was still a long way from the ground.

A small, bell-like sound warned him that his air supply was nearly exhausted. He waited a few more seconds; then, as breathing became increasingly difficult, he snapped open the transparent globe covering his head and yanked in desperation at the release cord of his parachute.

Fire seemed to bite into his lungs.

Sheer agony forced him to take another, deeper, breath—and he blacked out with pain....

“CUT THE REST of the thing off,” a voice was saying.

Larry opened his eyes. He was lying on a grassy plot of ground. His helmet was off and a couple of men were kneeling over him. He gulped the air as if he could never get enough. Suddenly a face peered down into his.

“Okay now, son?” a voice asked.

Larry studied the face for a moment. It was not a young face and there were tired lines along the cheeks and around the eyes. The eyes beneath thick black brows looked straight into Larry’s, and the chin indicated its owner could be stubborn as a Missouri mule.

“Yeah,” Larry said tiredly. “Any of the other guys come down?”

“There were others?”

“Hundred of us, I think.”

“I see. No. You were the only one. And if Jack Sanders hadn’t seen you.... But I wouldn’t worry about the others. They probably landed safely. Think you can stand?”

Larry answered the question by rising. A spell of dizziness made him grab the other for support but the spell passed and Larry was able to stand alone. He looked about him. It was night and the only illumination was starlight. Not even a searchlight beam lighted the sky.

“Looks like Chicago, mister,” Larry said.

“Right. It is, or I should say, *was*.”

“You mean—?”

“Like all the other cities of the world. Rubble. These space raiders are sure tough babies. Look, Lieutenant, what happened up there?”

Larry told him without mincing words. The space fleet of the com-

bined nations of the Earth had failed miserably to stem the advance of the strangers from outer space. The strangers had superior ships and weapons. It had happened so swiftly, so completely without warning, that they were caught flat-footed.

Why, Larry thought with sudden surprise, the whole thing is but a week old! He remembered the first afternoon. That same morning he had flown out from London to the port out of Coventry where his crew was assembled. He got his orders and was glad to learn he was assigned to a comfortable cruiser instead of a destroyer, as it had been the time before. How proud he had been of the G-sector fleet. They were to meet A-B-C and D sectors at a predetermined spot about ten thousand miles from Earth.

That alone saved Earth from complete wreckage. For as they reached their destination they were met by warnings of the approach of the strange air fleet. They had immediately notified the air command for the Western Hemisphere, who in turn alerted all stations. The strangers had struck with wanton savagery. For seven days Larry had known nothing but fight, run and fight again.

It had all been in vain.

HE LOOKED about and saw the wreckage of what once had been the most beautiful city in the United States. Rubble, the stranger had called it. Well, rubble it was. But men stood in that rubble and it would take men to save this world.

“Who are you?” Larry asked.

“Ed Burns,” the stranger said briskly. “These are the men of the emergency squad. Or at least what’s left of it. The last we heard the enemy had landed in New York. Do you have any later reports?”

"No I don't. But this I can tell you. They've got the damned biggest transports I've ever seen. A thousand feet long; hell, they're three hundred feet through the middle. I'll bet one carries ten thousand men. And I saw a string of them that stretched for a hundred miles. There must have been a thousand of them."

"Who are they and what do they want, Lieutenant?" Burns asked.

"The name is Higgins, Larry Higgins. What do they want? You got me. Who they are I know. I was in the Captain's cabin when the message came. They are the people of Mu, whatever and wherever that is. Strange, but the message came in English, on the audio. Simply put, it demanded we surrender. Unconditional surrender. Of course you know the answer they got."

Burns nodded. "I can imagine. Well, maybe I would have told them the same thing. I don't know. On the other hand perhaps all this might have been avoided. We would still have a President, Congress, the Supreme Court. Now we are a scattered people, without leadership, without law and order. A rabble, Higgins. A rabble in the rubble!"

LARRY felt himself go pale. President Tait dead! And those others of the Senate and House, and the Justices. He felt his face burn with the heat of anger. Words of passion and hate stormed from his lips.

Burns waited until the anger died in him.

"All right. Now that you've gotten that out of your system, suppose we talk sense. You're a bit behind the march of events. The enemy is in this city, right now. So let's get to where our friends are. It will be a lot safer than here in the open."

The way led among the ruins and

rubble. Larry was horrified at the destruction the enemy had wrought. The huge skyscrapers, ripped and torn, their girders facing the sky like the skeletons of the age. Now and then Larry recognized a building, a street, but only parts remained.

Suddenly they stopped. Ahead, beams of lights moved among the ruins.

"A patrol," Burns whispered. "In here, quickly!"

Fallen stones had created an arch and the six men of Burns' group and Larry charged into its protection. They peered out from behind the huge blocks of stone, and a few moments later Larry caught his first glimpse of the enemy.

Until now, the enemy had been only a name to him. There were some twenty in the group. In the faint light, he saw that they were tall men, wearing a sort of waistcoat and a short kilt reaching halfway to the knees. What appeared to be ordinary rifles were slung across their shoulders. They carried stubby-looking flashlights, which they directed at whatever looked suspicious to them.

Suddenly one of Burns' men moved, and in so doing dislodged a stone which clattered to the ground. It sounded like an earthquake to the tense group in hiding. The enemy froze instantly and the rifles were unslung with a quickness which told of long practice. The leader voiced a low command and they started to fan out.

It was then that Burns proved he could think quickly. From his throat came a deep sound, half-growl, half bark, that startled Larry into believing, momentarily, that a dog was actually beside him.

The searcher stopped their progress toward the arch of stones. The leader said, "An animal! Send a shell in

there. Pitah. Hurry now, man!"

There was no sound of gunfire as the man called Pitah lifted his rifle and fired. The impact of the projectile striking one of the stones sent a small cloud of dust falling around those in hiding, like a grey mantle. The patrol moved on, and after a while Burns and the rest slipped along the deserted and darkened streets, like shadows.

"There it is," Burns said finally, pointing.

Larry looked across the rubble-strewn street in surprise. Burns was pointing to what had been the entrance to a subway station.

"Okay, Ted," Burns said. "You first."

One of the group ran swiftly across the wide street and ducked into the yawning hole. One by one the rest followed. Larry found himself in complete darkness. With the arrival of Burns, the group started off again. It seemed to Larry that they moved by instinct, so absolute was the darkness.

THEY REACHED the head of a flight of stairs. Far down, Larry saw a pinpoint of light. It was evidently their goal, for the first man headed straight for it. The stairs were not long, but it was the first of two similar flights. Oddly, the glow of light did not get much brighter. When they reached the train platform, they stepped down onto the tracks and moved swiftly along the ties. The track curved and Larry tried to picture in his mind's eye the route they were taking. Dampness along the walls told him they were crossing under the Chicago River.

The long curve they now began to follow was the clue Larry needed. They were heading north. At the end of the curve, just as it straightened, they reached their goal. Larry stared

open-mouthed in wonder at the scene before him.

Dozens of bonfires illuminated the entire area. The smoke was thick and oily. Larry could not estimate off-hand but he concluded there were at least a thousand men, women and children in this tunnel. There was much shouting and noise. Some of the people about the fires paused in their talk to greet Burns and those with him.

Burns led his party straight to one of the fires at the far end of the encampment. As the flickering firelight revealed his face, two of the women there cried out in surprise and threw themselves into his arms.

"Lieutenant Higgins," Burns said, "this is my wife, Eve—and my daughter, Faith."

The older woman, Larry saw, was worth a second glance from any man. But it was Faith who widened his eyes in sudden and involuntary tribute. She was tall for a woman, slender yet softly curved in the places where a man appreciates curves most. A cloud of dark hair fell loosely about the smooth oval of an incredibly lovely face. In the wavering light he made out the firm line of her chin and the dark beauty of her eyes. There was intelligence mirrored there—intelligence and strength and unplumbed depths of emotion.... He wondered a little sadly if he wasn't reading too much into a brief glance.

Burns cleared his throat—and the spell was broken. They found places about the fire and the leader of the emergency squad said, "Any new rumors I might have missed while we were upstairs?"

Faith said, "They've posted an announcement in front of the old Public Library. Amnesty to all who surrender. Torture and death to those who don't."

"Means our snipping is beginning

to get Roku where it hurts most," Burns observed with satisfaction.

"Who's Roku?" Larry Higgins asked, frowning.

That got him stared at. "Who do you think you've been fighting against, Lieutenant?"

"I told you I had no idea *who*," Larry said. "All I knew—all *any* of us knew up there—was that we were being attacked from outer space."

BURNS nodded. "Sounds reasonable.... It so happens that Roku is Lord of the Universe, Keeper of the Light, Warlord of Alero, the Beginning and the End of all Wisdom, Prince of Peace—and the dirty dog who blasted this whole damned planet of ours!"

"Sounds like somebody we should do something about," Larry said.

There was no humor in Burns' short laugh. "Matter of fact, Roku has established his headquarters right here in what's left of Chicago. Got a half-million of his troops stationed along the lake front; and God knows how many more over the rest of the world. Try doing something about *that*!"

In the brief silence following those last words, Larry found himself looking straight into Faith Burns' flashing eyes. Perhaps it was what he saw there that shaped his reply.

"All it should take," he said softly, "is guts and brains. I've been accused of having a little of both!"

His Celestial Majesty, Mu, Emperor of all he surveyed, on Earth, Mu, and the whole of his and any other Universe, sat bemused and introspective. His ministers stood in a close group at the far end of the room. The concubines he had brought along, to the number of four hundred, sat or lay about on their silken pillows. Some chatted and gossiped, others worked at the little things all women work

at to make time pass, and others made eyes at the courtiers of Mu's court.

Mu did not like this planet Earth. He did not like the city these beings called Chicago. He did not like any of what his senses spoke to him of. But whether he liked it or no he was bound to stay his time out.

"Bohar...." he called softly.

"Majesty...." Bohar, Chancellor and commander of Mu's forces stepped forward and waited his ruler's desire.

"This was a vast city, wasn't it?" Large as mine own?"

"Aye, Majesty. But we reduced it without trouble."

Mu's amber eyes closed halfway. A small smile appeared on the rather full lips. His face was strong and fair, the blond hair set in a full bang across the forehead, a circlet of solid gold holding it prisoner. Mu tapped at his lips with a delicate finger.

"Bohar is never at a loss for information. Except when his Emperor desires specific information. Tell me, Bohar. How long must we remain on this misbegotten planet?"

Bohar smiled easily. His was a cautious, cunning nature. As the saying went, Bohar never let his left hand know what the right was doing. He had known from the first that Mu had not wanted to leave his own planet and travel the vast spaces of the great void to reach this strange place. Deep within the recesses of his own mind Bohar too, thought the whole thing a waste of time. So what if Mu died? The high priests would select another Mu. After all, the name and title were but symbols. The man was nothing. But while Mu lived nothing must be left undone to insure his continued good health.

So Bohar let the smile play about his lips as he answered:

"Mighty Mu. It grieves me that his

Greatness is bored. Let him but speak, and his smallest desire shall be instantly satisfied."

"I am not bored," said the man on throne. "And you have not answered my question...."

The smile went away. The features of the thin man standing with bent head before the man on the throne, reflected nothing of what lay in his mind. They were bland, empty.

"I do not know, Greatness," Bohar spoke carefully. Sometimes Mu wanted such an answer. It satisfied him that common men, no matter their state, did not have the reasons for everything. Now Mu smiled.

"So-o! My highest minister must confess ignorance. Is this Bohar, who knows all, and has the capacity to say nothing? But surely Bohar is not going to keep his Emporer in ignorance. I say I do not like this place. Am I to stay here until Bohar's whim is satisfied?"

NOW BOHAR was on safe ground. Had Mu said nothing Bohar would have felt uneasy. Now he was safe. So once more the lips twisted in a smile.

"Greatness. It is not a matter of whim. Bohar is leaving no stone unturned to bring this situation to a conclusion. But time remains an element and cannot be changed. The Patience of His Greatness is a symbol which has set a pattern and example for his peoples to follow...."

Mu wanted to laugh. This sly Bohar. How unctiously the words rolled from his twisted lips. But the fellow was amusing with his maneuverings toward power. A grimace of pain, quickly repressed, tortured the muscles of Mu's face. But quickly as the spasm passed, Bohar had noted it. Very little escaped his eyes.

"His Greatness is fatigued," Bohar

said. "I am prostrate with grief. Let this small miserable person find solace for the boredom which has taken him. I have it, Greatness! Today, this morning, one of my patrols brought in an Earthling, a miserable creature of rags and filth. He came willingly with hatred in his heart. For he had been cast from the safety of his fellows and thrown upon the streets to fare as best he could. He has promised to show us the way to one of their burrows. It will be fine sport to watch as we force them out...."

Mu watched the other stroke his rather long hooked nose as he spoke. Sometimes Mu felt disgust with Bohar. This was one of the times. Bohar loved to torture. Mu had been a witness to one of Bohar's hunts. And had found no pleasure in it.

Mu's hand suddenly went up in a sweeping gesture. It was a signal that he wanted to be alone. Instantly the entire court made deep obeisance and backed out of the vast hall. Only the personal guard remained.

As Bohar stepped out upon the street, he turned for a last look at the building. A sign hung in broken disrepute from one of its moorings. The sign said "Arcadia Roller Rink." Then Bohar called to one of his Captains, as his personal car pulled up: "Bring the prisoner to my quarters."

Bohar had established his headquarters in the old Steven's Hotel on the lake front. There he had taken four entire floors. Night and day foot soldiers stepped in smart parade before the huge structure. A dozen stationary balloons, manned by picked gunners, flew a hundred feet above the roof of the building. Bohar was not taking any chances on a surprise attack.

The general staff of which he was civilian head had its quarters on the floor directly above the last of those he had in use. He took the elevator

directly to that floor. He walked down the corridor leading to the staff room, followed by his personal guard and attendants. They waited for him in the large anteroom as he followed the corporal of the guard, who called his name and rank on entry to staff headquarters.

Guardian of the Air, Hunto, and Guardian of the Land, Suta, stepped smartly forward, shook hands with Bohar and motioned him to a seat on a divan at which they were having a snack. He joined them, refusing their offer of food politely but firmly, and said:

"Do not let me stay your meal. My reason for coming is important but can wait until your hunger is satisfied."

They knew better than to continue eating. Neither trusted Bohar, but since he was Chancellor, therefore next to Mu, himself, in importance, he was a power they had to reckon with. It was entirely his responsibility as to the deciding of the fitness of any of the command. Their rank depended on his good-will.

"We have just done with it," Hunto said, licking the food from his fingers. "Bohar must have important news, indeed, to come here."

"His Greatness is becoming bored." Bohar spoke casually. He spotted a pastry and reached for it with delicately prying fingers. He shook his head and his eyes rolled on tasting the succulent food. "Give the chef my compliments. But you military... Aah! Who else can eat as well... Now as I was saying, His Greatness is bored. Already he is thinking of the pleasures of Mu—"

HUNTO and Suta looked at each other. The same expression of pained surprise showed on their faces.

"—However, it was to be expected.

Let me see... a week has gone by. We have conquered much and taken over the places of importance to our scheme of things. It was on this continent, was it not, that the exploratory discs landed—?"

They nodded gravely.

"—As I thought..." He took another bite of the pastry. "Aah! So good. You must have your chef prepare this for me... Now! Samples of food in use here were brought back to Mu. If you will forgive this small digression and relating of past history I will not take much more of your time. A single item in the vast number of foods was found to have the strange property of positive therapeutic value in the illness of His Greatness. A small sliver of something they called *gum*! It acted with miraculous effectiveness!

"Not only did it allay his pains, it retarded, and as his physicians discovered, would eventually act as a cure, for his illness. So it was decided that this planet must be invaded, for surely so important a food would not be relinquished by peaceful means. Mu, himself, decided to come along. Now a week has gone by and, although we have won our goal, we are still not in possession of this gum for which we have come. I must know your plans in this matter!"

There it was. The glove was removed. And Bohar showed the steel beneath.

Hunto smacked his lips loudly, leaned back and folded his hands across his flat military belly. He was the talker of the two, Suta the silent, introspective one.

"It is only natural that Bohar, in his capacity as Chancellor, asks this important question," Hunto said gravely. "As he knows, our Security Patrols have been busy. Prisoners have been brought in and questioned. We have found many strange facts in re-

gard to this matter of gum. It appears that there are many kinds, qualities, and brands of gum in use. Not only that, but it is a something a great deal of people chew. Perhaps it acts with the same efficacy on them as it does on His Greatness, and is a common cure-all?

"The point of the matter, however, is this. The brand which was brought to Mu was called Higgins' Chicle. We have searched diligently, and have discovered this. The gum is no longer being manufactured. This man, Higgins decided to leave the business of gum-making, when his only son, Larry, joined the air force of his country. Whatever stock was left we confiscated. But it will not be enough, for the physicians proclaimed the amount needed would have to fill a space transport. There just isn't that much."

This *was* news, Bohar thought. He nibbled at a finger as he thought it over. Impasses were not to his liking. Already Mu was bored. It would not be long before Mu would take steps to relieve Bohar of his Chancellorship....

"Have you made any attempt to find this Larry Higgins?" he asked.

"The Security Patrol is on constant alert. But as you can understand it is a vast undertaking, this seeking of one man. We must ask for time and patience."

HANG IT, Bohar thought. Time and patience, the very things he could spare little of.

"How much time?" he asked. "Patience is another matter."

"I don't know," Hunto said frankly. "We are in constant touch with those in the city of Washington. This we know. He was on a cruiser of the air fleet. I expect something very soon. Suppose we let it go until I have re-

ceived something definite on the matter?"

Bohar had to agree to it. His leave-taking was rather abrupt and left no doubt in the minds of the Guardians that Bohar's patience was a very transitory thing....

Bohar flung himself on the sofa, his brow clouded in anger and frustration. His suite was the most elaborate in the hotel, with a full view of the sparkling waters of Lake Michigan. But his mind was not on the view. It concerned itself with the problematical whereabouts of a man named Larry Higgins. The possibility that Higgins might be dead made Bohar come erect. It was possible because if he was a member of the air arm he might have been on one of the ships which were blasted from the sky. So that when the knock came at his door, he shouted angrily for the one at the other side to enter.

It was one of his Captains, with the prisoner Bohar had asked to have brought to him.

The man was of middle height, ragged in filthy clothes. He was dark-skinned, which with the two-week old growth of beard gave him a look of disreputableness. He held his head low and spoke only when words were sent his way.

"So this is the one, eh, Captain Helat? Well, what do you have to say for yourself? What is this vital information you have?"

"Maybe it won't do you any good," the man said. "Guess I was thinkin' that maybe I don't know nothin'. Maybe...."

Bohar smiled. "Captain Helat," he said softly. "I am in no mood for this surly lout. Have a few of your men teach him that a loose tongue gains more than a tight one."

For an instant the prisoner's eyes

lifted. A spark of sheer hatred flamed in the dark orbs, then was extinguished as the man said hastily: "No! Now, wait. I just remembered what it was I wanted to talk about. No need to get mad, Senator. I'll talk fast enough. I know where there's a whole gang of those bloody people. Thought they was smart, eh. But no one pushes 'Smoky' Ivering around. Not without gettin' hurt. I don't mean you, Gov'ner," he declared hastily in amendment. "But those jerks. I'll even up wit' 'em, all right."

"Here's the layout. They're down in the nort' section of the new subway. Downstairs. A whole mob of 'em. An' guess who's there? Burns. The man who thinks he's boss 'cause he's an old big-shot; used to be an alderman."

The name meant nothing to Bohar. But the fact that there was a large number of these Earthlings in hiding meant a great deal. Bohar had long experience with revolutionaries. Men like this Burns could become thorns in the sides of Bohar's forces. Guerilla warfare, especially in this unknown world could be costly.

"Captain Helat," Bohar said, turning to the officer. "Why didn't he tell you this? Why was it necessary to come to me with this information?"

"He claimed it was for your ears alone."

"How was it he knows of me?" Bohar asked shrewdly. "I did not know my fame had spread. Nor my name."

They turned to Smoky Ivering, who tried to smile, but managed a quivering of his lips that was like the grimace of fear.

"Well. . . ." Bohar pressed.

"I—I heard one of the patrol mention your name, Senator," he quavered. "And I figured I could get a buck or two out of it. . . . Jeez! Honest! I wouldn't lie!"

"Very well," Bohar said. "Take enough men and arms to clean up this lot in the subway or whatever their place of hiding. As for you, if what you have told is a lie or trap I promise that every breath you draw will make you wish it were the last. Take him away, Captain. . . ."

THE TWO men strolled along the ties. One was in coveralls, the other wore the uniform of the air arm. They talked in low tones as they walked along, pausing only to answer the challenges of the guards.

"....But what can you do, Burns?" Larry Higgins asked, getting down to basics, as he called them. "They're an organized, efficient military organization. Even with a like amount of men, without the arms we need, the training, the efficiency, we don't stand a chance. Believe me. I know of what I speak."

"You are right, Larry," Burns replied. "Right and wrong. You keep forgetting one fact. We are the invaded. These are our home grounds. Wherever they have landed and struck. Those places are the home grounds. No matter how long their stay they will always be the enemy. And some day we will be strong enough to drive them out."

Larry shook his head in wonder. Perhaps he didn't have the faith of this man. Perhaps he didn't or couldn't see the things the other saw. He knew only that they were superior to any rabble, for that was precisely what Burns' followers were.

Once more the walk was resumed. This time a long interval of silence during which each man thought his own thoughts. Burns' sharp laugh, sudden and surprising as a summer shower, made Larry look to the other in wonder.

"I was just thinking," Burns said

in explanation, "that these strangers from another world must be nuts. Do you know what they keep looking for? Gum! Chewing gum!"

"Well that is goofy. Have they said why?"

"No. They've confiscated every piece in the city, from every store and any and all possible places where it was kept or sold, including the huge Wrigley warehouse. They've even posted rewards for it. Wonder why?"

Larry shrugged his shoulders. Goofy or otherwise, these strangers from another world had certainly made a mess of theirs. He looked up for an instant and saw a square of light ahead. He turned to Burns, who was walking head bent low, eyes on the ties beneath his feet.

"Burns...."

"Huh....?"

"What's that ahead?"

"End of the line, my boy," Burns said. "That's where the subway come up for air. H'm. Looks like daylight's ahead too. Care to see what it looks like up there?"

"Might as well."

The square widened, broadened, lengthened until they saw grey sky beyond. And suddenly figures appeared within the square. Like a flash Burns grabbed Larry, whirled him about, and dashed wildly back along the way they had come. Larry raced beside the silent man, wondering what in the world had possessed him.

"Security patrol!" Burns grunted. "And not a small one. Got to get back and warn the rest..."

The thought of the women and children ahead made Larry speed his steps until he was racing yards ahead of Burns. Soon they would be in the range of the nearest guards.

"Go...on!" Burns shouted. "Call to the guards. I'll...catch up..."

"Security patrol! Security pa-

trol!" Larry shouted in reiterated warning as he ran. "Call the alarm! Call the alarm..."

MEN SUDDENLY appeared from the deep niches in the walls, which had been constructed for emergency measures in case of power failures, but which were now used for arms and guard units. These men looked back down the line where Larry's hand pointed as he ran, saw Burns following, and dashed out onto the middle of the tracks.

Soon there were several lines of guards standing between the enemy and the main camp, deep in the heart of the subway.

Then came the first sounds of firing.

Larry waited at the turn for Burns, who came an instant later, puffing and almost spent from the pace he and Larry had set. He held to Larry's arm until breath returned to his lungs. Then, still gasping slightly, they proceeded at a swift walk that was almost a trot toward the main group.

And suddenly the sound of firing came from that end also.

The two men looked at each other, fear writ large on their faces. Gone was the fatigue from Burns' body. His wife and daughter were there ahead of them. And this time Larry found it hard to keep up with the other.

They met the first of those in retreat. Led by a group of armed guards, the first to leave were the women and children. Burns heaved a sigh of relief on seeing his daughter and wife. They rushed forward and embraced. But Larry did not let them remain in each other's arms for too long. He had recognized the trap the patrol had sprung. They were all lost.

"No!" Burns said grimly as Larry

spoke his thoughts. "That was one of the reasons why I decided on the sub-way as a hideout and base of operations. In nineteen eighty six, in the last year of the War of the Spheres, they constructed an escape hatch should the ends of the tunnel become blocked from bomb bursts. We're not far from it...."

He stopped and lifted his head. The firing had become sporadic. And now he heard the sound of many running footsteps, from both sides.

"Better get the women and children out of here," Larry said. "Sounds like the retreat has become a rout."

Burns called the guards to his side and issued instructions. The rush toward the escape hatch began. Burns started to go but turned when he saw Larry wasn't following.

"Higgins! There isn't much time! Come on."

But Larry had already seen the first of the guards, followed by others of Burns' group. They were literally racing for those in the center. Unless something were done immediately the women and children might not escape. Larry took the initiative. Shoving Burns toward the group running for the escape hatch, Larry said in a tone that was imperative in its demand:

"Got to hold them off. Get to your wife and daughter!"

Nor did Burns hesitate.

"**HOLD IT!**" Larry shouted, standing full before those coming to meet him from either side. "Hold it!"

Whether it was his manner, the voice of authority, or what, but hold it they did. In a short while a hundred or so men were gathered in a close group about Larry.

"We've got to stop them long

enough for the women and children to escape!" Larry said. "This is an ideal place for an ambush. There are curves to either side, and no matter what kind of guns they've got they can't shoot curves with them. Half of you get to that end, the other half follow me. And shoot from the ground up. It's hard to hit a man lying down."

It seemed they had barely stretched themselves in staggered rows under Larry's direction, when the first of the kilted warriors arrived. Larry had also told them to make the first volley count, therefore to shoot in one single concerted effort. After it was fire at will.

Larry had been given a short-barreled machine-carbine, a terrific weapon at short range. He lay stretched out, his feet well apart, the gun cradled deep against his shoulder, the stub barrel held out in front of him and his eyes on the twin sights. He waited until the first of the patrol were but ten yards away before giving the signal for firing. His only hope was that the men would hold off until he gave the signal. Had they been trained fighters it would have been another matter. But he knew how hard it was for civilians to keep their nerve when the enemy was so close.

The kilted men fell as though their ranks had been swept by a giant scythe. The wildest confusion reigned as Larry's forces continued to shoot after the first volley. The retreat was general and many there were who did not rise and run.

There was a burst of wild cheering from those about Larry. And from the opposite end they heard a moment or so later the echo to their exultant voices. Larry's counsel had proved the best and certainly the most effective stop-gap against the enemy. But Larry did not raise his voice with the

others. He knew the kilted men would be back. And when they returned again it would not be quite so easy.

Larry's mind worked with lightning speed. It was only a question of time, as he saw it, before they would be wiped out. There were too many against them. There was but one way that some of them, at least, might win out and get away. Well, he thought, as he turned to them, it cost nothing to ask.

"All right, men!" he called them to him in a sharp though low-pitched voice. "Let's get ourselves straightened out right now. We don't stand a chance waiting for them to come to us. Soon or late they'll get us. I say the best defense is a good offense. What do you say?"

They looked at each other in wonder. Was this man in uniform asking them to commit suicide? Or was it suicide?

Larry decided it for them: "Some of us are going to get it in the neck. But what the hell! We can't live forever. And if we hit them now while they're getting regrouped for another attack the surprise will be in our favor. Some of us are bound to win through...."

It was agreed then. Larry sent a runner back to let the others know of their decision. But he wasn't going to wait for their answer.

"Let's go, men!" he shouted, and started forward at a run.

Luck was with them in more ways than one. To begin with, Larry had picked the most opportune moment to attack. The men of Mu were in a daze from the beating they had gotten. Too, they had chosen an ill-lit spot for the regrouping Larry knew they would have to do. Also, they had lost a large number of commanding officers in their wild attack.

So when Larry, leaping at the head

of his men, came on them, they simply stood and stared at these wild Earthlings running at them as if intent on their own destruction.

NOW IT was man against man. And for the first time the people of the Earth discovered a strange fact. These strangers, though more powerful in weapons of war, simply did not stand up when it came to manpower. They melted as butter does before the fire. Time after time an Earthman was pitted against a man of Mu and always the Earthman won out. There was but one drawback. The forces of Larry were a handful, and after a while the greater number of the men of Mu wore them down. Larry saw his force melt away slowly but surely.

At the end he found himself backed against a wall. The shattered stock of the carbine was in one fist. He felt as if he had absorbed the worst punishment his body had ever known. One eye was swollen shut, his nose dripped a steady stream of blood and his mouth had been cut. But his eyes noted with a great deal of personal satisfaction the number of bodies lying about in the circle his vicious swings had created.

His breath whistled in his throat in painful cadence to the beat of his heart. It was such an effort to hold the broken stock up....

"Surrender, Earthman!" a voice called to him.

He looked up through suddenly bleary eyes. There was a tall man, slender in his elaborate uniform of a Captain. The man's eyes looked coldly into his.

"....Surrender, Earthman, or die...."

The full weight of his weariness settled about Larry Higgins' shoulders. The broken carbine fell to the ground.

His shoulders slumped and he slid down until he was sitting.

"Looks—like you got me—pal," Larry grunted painfully from between his swollen lips.

"He wears the uniform of an air officer," the Captain said. "What is your name and rank?"

"Lieutenant Lawrence Higgins..of the..of the...." It was strange, Larry thought, that all these oddly-dressed ghouls should go into a dance snip-y because he had surrendered. It must be a dance, this wild gyration. Why they were spinning like tops, one and all, and the one who spun most madly was the Captain. Too, he was growing taller, thinner, and now he was so thin he looked as though he were standing on edge. Larry began to laugh. He had never seen a man on edge before. He laughed louder and louder at the sight. And suddenly he stopped. If a man who was on edge had to dance, then why wasn't he, Larry Higgins, late of the Earth Air Force, spinning also?

But he was! Spinning into a dark well at the bottom of which was a pinpoint of light. And as he reached the bottom he saw a face. It was the face of a woman, the face of Faith Burns. She was smiling up at him and her mouth framed words.... "I will be waiting. Come back... Come back, comebackcomeback...."

IT WAS LIKE a down mattress, Larry decided. It was a down mattress! He sat straight up and looked about. He was lying in an elaborate bed in a bedroom that was the most elegant he had ever seen. Two men in kilts stood guard before the door at the far end of the room. Each man held a rifle on his shoulder. A man was seated on a wide deep chair, his legs straight out before him, crossed at the ankles. The man's face was

long, saturnine in its expression, brooding in its look. He was staring with almost morbid intentness at Larry.

"I had almost decided to return at a later time," the man said. "Fortunately I make a virtue of patience. How do you feel?"

"Horrible," Larry said. "Like I'd been on a drunk for a week. How did you expect me to feel?"

"The bruises...? I had my personal physician doctor you up. Said you'd be as good as new in a day. Captain Helat told me you were the leader of the group in the underground place. He said you did a most excellent job of defense, and that had you more men at your disposal it might have been a sorry experience for him."

"Yeah!" Larry said, sitting straight up. "He has my sympathy. Unfortunately I *didn't* have enough men. But why this personal attention? You said you'd been waiting up for me? Do you always play nursemaid to your prisoners?"

"Dear me, no, Lieutenant! Not even for the Admiral of your Air Fleet would I waste a second of my precious time. But before I go into details, do you have, or have had anything to do with a product called Higgins' Chicle Gum?"

Larry looked startled, remembering what Burns had said about their wild search for gum. He didn't answer, but swung his legs over the edge of the bed. He wanted a few seconds in which to gain control of his senses. Somehow, he felt, the next few minutes might decide his fate.

"Why do you ask?"

Bohar's lips thinned. He didn't like his questions answered with another question. It was on the tip of his tongue to summon the whip squad; men danced a merry tune at the end of the lash, and talked freely, if only to stop the biting tongues of the thin

metal tips. . . . But he would wait.

"Lieutenant," Bohar spoke with care. "I think that it is an unwritten law in the air force that it is better to die than betray your country. That same law holds good with us. We have travelled an incalculable distance and gone through a great deal of needless misery, caused all manner of destruction, cost the deaths of millions of peoples, all for the reason of an oblong bit of food. Gum! Higgins' Chicle Gum, to be specific.

"Wait!" he commanded as Larry opened his lips. "Wait! I will come to the point and you will understand why I refer to the unwritten law. We have come here in the search for this gum. The reason for it does not concern you! Thus far we have located every single stick on the face of the Earth; well, anyway, wherever we have searched. But we discovered in our searching that the manufacturer of this gum, Lawrence Higgins, Sr., is dead. And that he left a son, the sole heir to his fortune and manufacturing process, Lawrence Higgins, Jr. You are Lawrence Higgins, Jr. Is that correct?"

THE STARTLED look had given way to one of complete bewilderment on Larry's face. For some odd reason, Larry realized, he had become a figure of importance to these people. If only he played his cards right something might be achieved without the resort to violence. . . .

"Yes. I'm Larry Higgins. And it is my father who owned the rights to the process of the gum. But what is all this?"

A joyous light danced in Bohar's eyes. By the six-headed God! He had done it! The High Priest Ishtar would be more than pleased. Mu was saved and the men of Mu could now return. His Greatness could live for eternity,

now, and Bohar would remain Chancellor forever.

He arose and began a measured pacing back and forth before Larry. "Higgins," Bohar's words fairly bristled with excitement, "you have the power to save your world, and all the peoples in it. Now, by simply manufacturing all the gum we want!"

This guy's nuts! Larry decided. Or was he? What the heck had Higgins' Chicle Gum to do with saving the world?

"It isn't quite as easy as you make it sound," Larry put a damper on Bohar's enthusiasm. "There are a few things we have to consider. Quite a few."

Bohar stopped his wild pacing and faced Larry, a dazed look in his eyes. Then anger leaped from him: "Higgins! I don't want to consider anything, or listen to excuses! I want that gum! I'll have this planet scourged and flayed and beaten until not a single living thing survives. I swear it by the six-headed God! I want that gum!"

"Okay! Okay! So don't get your gun off! It's going to take a while to get things together. That is, if there's anything left to the planet? There are papers, processes, patents to look into. These are things we must do. Making gum isn't a simple thing. Especially Higgins' Chicle Gum."

Bohar controlled himself after a second or two. The other was right, he thought. Well, now at least, he could go to Mu and assure him that it was only a matter of time. As for amusing Mu, well, Bohar had seen some of the female prisoners Helat had captured. They would do. . . .

"You're right, of course, Higgins," Bohar said. "Very well. Consider yourself my guest. But before we go into details and explore the means of this gum manufacture, His Greatness, Mu,

Light of the Universe, is awaiting you. Come...."

Larry slid off the bed and found that he was quite all right. The personal medico of this character was an okay doc. There were still some bruises to be felt, but they did not pain him. He looked down at his uniform and shook his head sadly at its state of disrepute. But if this character thought it was all right to see his Greatness Phew then it was all right with Larry.

The guards pushed the doors open and they stepped out into a corridor where a squad of the kilted men came to stiff attention. At their head stood a figure that seemed familiar to Larry.

"Highest Leader...." Captain Helat stepped forward.

"Aah! Captain Helat! Higgins, this is the man who effected your capture."

Larry looked the other up and down. There was no question in his mind that here was a soldier. And a damned good one.

"Well, Captain," Bohar said, "we are on our way to an audience with His Greatness. Wish us well."

"I do, sir," Helat replied. "I have already ordered the car."

"Thanks, Captain," Bohar said. "Then we'll be on our way."

LARRY FOUND himself smiling broadly as they drove up before the building which had once housed a roller rink. What a place for a palace. As if Bohar had read his mind, he said:

"We were forced to a temporary use of this building. Soon our construction men will have a more fitting place ready for His Greatness. Oh! I see that the prisoners of last night's raid are here. Your late compatriots, Higgins."

Larry looked quickly to where Bo-

har had gestured with his head. Standing in a forlorn huddle, guarded on all sides by armed guards, were perhaps a couple of hundred men, women and children. And as Larry stepped out of the car after Bohar, one of the figures detached itself from the rest and dashed toward Larry. But before he had gone more than a few feet one of the guards was on him. And an instant later Burns fell to the ground, knocked unconscious by a blow from the butt of the guard's rifle. And as he fell two women ran to him and knelt at his side.

Larry stood stock-still. His mind was in a ferment. Every part of him seemed aflame with the desire to come to the aid of the man on the ground. But from somewhere in his subconscious came the message which stilled the hot words that came to his lips. And made him pause as his body bent toward Burns. His subconscious told him that for some reason he had become of importance to these people. Perhaps important enough for them to grant him concessions.

"Fool!" Bohar spat the word out, yet without emotion. "Well, he'll know better next time. Come along, Higgins...."

Had Bohar been a trifle more observant, a trifle less bloated with self-importance at the role he was about to play, he would have noticed the paleness of Larry's features, the set expression to the other's mouth and eyes. But he was impatient to relate to Mu how wonderful a man Bohar was, how well he served his Emperor. So he turned hastily from the sight of the prisoners and led the way into the large hall.

It had been many years since Larry had been to the Arcadia Rink. The changes were not too great, with the exception of an immense wall of metal which served as a partition between

the main rink and the smaller one at the rear. It was to the smaller one they were bound.

Here in the large hall were the selected body of guards, and standing at stiff attention before the entrance which had been cut into the metal for entrance into the room of the Emperor, was a whole platoon of picked men. They saluted Bohar as he strode up to the squad leader, who opened the door himself, and announced to the Chamberlain standing at the inside threshold that Bohar had arrived.

The word was relayed down to Mu, who was sitting absorbed in the words of a man in uniform. He waved the court messenger away, looked fleetingly up, then gave his attention to the man in uniform again. Bohar, with Larry at his side, walked down the length of carpet until they were within a yard or so of the raised dais. Suddenly Mu laughed, said something to the officer and waved him away. He was still laughing softly to himself as he gave his attention to Bohar.

"Greatness!" Bohar spoke with dramatic elocution, as if the whole of the world were listening to his words. "Bohar, your humble servant, has accomplished single-handed what all the army and air force security has failed to do. He has found the reason for our being here. Our difficulties are at an end.

"I have found Lawrence Higgins!"

MU'S BROW creased in a frown of wonder, as if he were all at sea in regard to what Bohar was talking about. Bohar bit his lip, but inwardly. Sometimes Mu was a sore trial to him.

"His father was Higgins' Chicle Gum!" Bohar exclaimed.

"So-o! How very interesting," Mu said in amused tones. "But why is Bohar so puffed-up about this man? I

thought we were interested in his father?"

"His father is dead," Bohar explained. He almost made the mistake of explaining as one does to a child, with a palpable show of patience.

Mu pouted in understanding. So this tall young man was the Higgins for whom a planet had been invaded and millions of people killed. Looked like a nice young man, with not too much appearance of intelligence or initiative. In uniform, too. Mu looked at the insignia of the air force. Nice. He must talk to Hunto about a new design for the air fleet insignia. He liked the one Higgins wore. He caught sight of the door opening at the far end of the room and a new gleam of interest in his eyes showed he had already lost interest in Bohar and his find. Captain Gobo was about to bring in the wonderful females he had promised. . . .

Bohar knew every mood, and expression of them, that Mu showed. He had not been Chancellor for the time he was because he was a fool. He had recognized Captain Gobo, a sneaking, boot-licking officer, who curried favor like a common courtier. And from the officer's manner, Bohar had guessed what it was he had gone for. Gobo had been second in command at the raid on the subway and Captain Helat had left him in command when he left for Bohar's apartment.

Gobo had found women in whom Mu would find interest.

So it was Bohar turned casually aside and waited with mixed inner feelings for Mu to have his fun. His fingers pulled Larry to him, with gentle touch, while he whispered in an aside:

"This will not take long. His Greatness wearies quickly—"

Then Larry saw the women, and for the first time Bohar realized some-

thing was amiss. His glance was searching as he bent his head away from Larry, who was following the line of women to the spot where Gobo had preceded them a yard or so before the da's.

There were ten of them, some dark, some light, some tall and some of medium height. But one and all had lovely bodies and youth, and innocence. There were many whispered comments by the hundred of court attendants and concubines.

Larry felt himself go first hot, then cold, as he heard the frankly appraising words. For in the time between their arrival in the court itself, and their coming into the building, their clothes had been partly stripped from them. Almost all were stripped to the waist. But Larry had eyes for one alone, the fair and sweet Faith Burns.

Mu also had eyes for her. As if he recognized her innocence and purity, he nodded his head and said:

"The slender, fair one, there. Gobo may have his choice of any of the others. As for the rest, tell my chief concubine to prepare them for my court. . . . Come here, my pretty," he said to Faith.

But Faith Burns did not move. She looked full into the sensual eyes of the smiling man above her, and said:

"You dirty killer! Murderer of women and children. Coward! At least a soldier takes the chance of death when he fights. Not you, coward. I wish that my eyes and tongue had the power to maim and torture. You would be. . . ." she moaned suddenly as Gobo stepped forward and slapped her full on the mouth.

Gobo never knew what hit him. Before Bohar could even guess Larry's intentions, Larry had leaped forward and struck. His punch carried every ounce of his one hundred and ninety pounds of muscle and bone behind it.

But what was of greater effect, it carried the hatred, resentment and anger of the fury he felt at these invaders behind it.

The blow killed Gobo. He landed a full twenty feet from where Larry had struck him and skidded another five feet. His head was twisted at an odd angle. There was no question about it. Gobo was quite dead.

"**H**OLD!" MU said in commanding tones, as the guards converged on Larry the next second.

All movement ceased.

Even Larry felt compelled to wait developments, at the imperious tones. Bohar, feeling his moment of glory slipping away, moved slyly to Larry's side. Hang the Earthling, he thought. And if the chance were given him he would. But now they must move warily, depending on how Mu reacted to Larry's precipitate action.

"Earthman," Mu said softly, "why did you do what you did?"

The fact that Mu had called Larry Earthman presaged ill, Bohar thought. He tried to signal Larry by pressing at his arm, but Larry shook the gesture off roughly.

"No man can touch my wife the way he did and live. Not while there is breath in my body!" Larry said harshly, looking straight into Mu's eyes.

"Your wife?" Mu was surprised.

"Yes! We were separated in the tunnel when I went to the aid of the guards."

All the while Larry was talking he did not look at the girl. It wasn't that he was afraid or that she might give the show away by an unconscious gesture. Rather it was because he might flush at his presumptuousness. But he could not stand forever and not look. Especially when Mu, himself, kept looking first at one then

at the other, with some skepticism.

She was staring straight at him, Larry discovered, on her lips the strangest, most inscrutable smile he had ever seen.

"H'm," Mu said. "In that case, Earthman, the situation is more easily resolved. Had you been satisfied with saying merely that she was your wife all would have been well. Mu steals no man's wife. But neither does he refuse a challenge.

"So no man can touch her the way Gobo did, and live, eh? Is there but one way a man must touch your wife to inspire such anger as you have shown?"

"Any way a man touches her inspires me to murder!" Larry replied, going all the way. It was going to be all or nothing.

"**S**TRANGE," Mu said, in oddly gentle tones. "Very strange. But I must admit that this, this chivalry, pleases me. There is so little of it on my planet. I must discuss it with the High Priest on my return. Not that it would do good. He has always hushed me when it was a question of religion versus moral good.

"Very well, Higgins. Take her away...."

"But, Greatness," Bohar broke in. "He must not leave!"

"Why not?" Mu demanded.

"Because he is the only one who can manufacture the all-important gum."

"Ah, yes! The all-important gum," Mu said sadly. "Because of it we have come this vast distance.... Very well. What is it you want me to do now, Chancellor?"

"Notify the High Priest. Have him come here."

"Why? My physicians are here. They can administer the gum to me," Mu said sharply. It was all too evi-

dent that the last thing he desired was to have the High Priest come.

"We are established here. True, we made this great journey because of the gum, but why not take advantage of it? Here we have a colony fitted to our palm. But first the sanction of the High Priest is needed."

"One of these days, Bohar," Mu said, speaking ever so softly, "I will tire suddenly of your sly ways and manners and smile. Beware that day, Bohar! Very well. My Chancellor sees the need of the High Priest. See to it, then, that he is notified of our wishes in this matter."

Bohar stroked his mouth, if only to hide the grin of joy. He had managed even better than he had thought he would. And all because of the fool, Gobo. But now things had to be set in motion. First, Hunto must be told what to do. Then, this Higgins must get started on the manufacture of the gum....

Bohar made obeisance after gesturing for Larry and the girl to precede him.

"**W**HAT ARE they going to do with those prisoners?" Larry asked as the three stepped out to the car drawn up at the curb.

"What do you mean?" Bohar asked.

"My father-in-law, my wife's father, is among them. As is her mother. They must be released."

"Come now, Higgins! This part you've played. It was well done. But after all, Bohar is not Mu. The masquerade is over."

Larry felt that this Bohar *knew*. How he had known was a mystery. But Bohar had to prove his cleverness.

"Bohar has questioned many prisoners. Women as well as men. The married ones wear a band of metal about one of their fingers. The girl you

claimed was your wife was virgin as to marriage band. But more to the point of the matter was your vehemence in avenging her honor, although I could not see where it was damaged. On regaining consciousness there was no thought or voice of wife, when surely she would have been on your mind. So the anger you felt was not as a husband felt, but rather as a lover feels—"

Faith threw Larry a quick glance. And this time she rushed at the heat she saw in his eyes. Bohar had hit the nail on the head. Larry was in love with her, Faith suddenly realized.

"You are clever," Larry grudgingly admitted.

"Yes. And the sooner we come to an understanding the better it will be. Now as to this girl's father and mother, they concern me not. But because you desire their release I shall see to it. This moment. Captain..." he called to Helat.

"Yes, my Leader?" Helat saluted smartly.

"Release the girl's father and mother. They are in the group taken prisoner today. Give their names—"

Faith did as Bohar suggested. Then Bohar gestured for Larry and the girl to step into the car.

"Of course," he said as the car moved swiftly down the street, "you are aware of the fact that this masquerade you began must be carried to its proper conclusion. Mu will desire your attendance and will make inquiry as to your health. Further, Higgins, you will be under close watch all the time. Security measures. I would suggest that the marriage ceremony be performed the instant we enter my quarters."

"But—" Larry broke in.

Bohar waved his objections aside. "Should Mu find out that all this was a hoax he would be very angry. The

girl would neither be safe nor virgin. You would not be alive to save her. And as for me, well, I'm not sure but that that moment will be the one Mu spoke of. Therefore, for all our sakes and safety, get married. Tell me what sort of priest or whatever the official who performs these things is needed and I will have one brought forward. But let us not delay about it."

FAITH KEPT looking at Larry as they waited in the large anteroom of Bohar's apartment. Captain Helat and one of his lieutenants kept the two company. Larry fidgeted and fussed, never once looking at the girl.

Suddenly the inside door opened and a flustered man appeared, followed by Bohar. Bohar shoved the frightened man forward and said:

"Here are the two. Let us get this over with quickly."

The whole thing took but a minute. Bohar had even provided himself with a gold ring which he handed to Larry at the proper time. There was but a single hitch. As the official was about to pronounce them man and wife, Faith suddenly held up her hand, turned to Larry and said:

"One question. Do you love me, Larry?"

"With all my life and heart," Larry replied.

She smiled gravely at the answer, and let him place the ring on her finger. But when he kissed her, he was astounded to find her lips cool and distant to his touch.

"A man must prove his love," she said in answer to his unvoiced question. "And now, Bohar, I am sure that you have provided a place for the bride and groom to reside?"

"But of course," Bohar said.

"A mistake. A marriage of necessity is not to my liking. I would appreciate separate quarters."

"She is right," Larry agreed with her.

"As you wish. But had this happened to me. . . . But on Earth I see things are different from on Mu. So be it. I suppose that you would like your mother to reside with you?"

"Yes. And my father also."

"Mother, yes. Father, no. I am told he was the leader of this group in the subway. I guarantee his safety so long as he behaves. But he must be held in protective custody. Sorry. Now, Larry, if you will come with me—"

Larry turned for a last look in time to see her follow Captain Helat through a side door.

"She will still be here on your return," Bohar said with impatience. "We have more important matters to attend to."

Larry followed Bohar to his personal quarters. There three men awaited them. Two were in military uniform, the third in a sort of toga. They nodded in silence on their entrance and waited for Bohar to speak.

"This is Higgins," Bohar said. "Ask what you will."

THE ONE in the toga spoke first:

"Where can we obtain the formula for the gum?"

"My father's vault in the Third National Bank should have that," Larry said. "But I think the formula is the least important thing. Gum comes from a tree. And our gum came from a particular tree. These trees do not grow in profusion—that's the reason the big guys never bothered with us—and they grow deep in the heart of jungle land. I would suggest that you find out if we can get these trees. If so the rest is a small matter."

"This jungle you speak of. Where is it?" the other asked.

"In a place called Honduras, in

Central America—there only."

"He speaks the truth thus far," one of the military men said suddenly. "All this we have found out. We know the locality. But there are some things he hasn't mentioned. The natives, for example."

"Ah, yes! The natives. They don't take kindly to strangers. And they do not like to work. But that is something I can't help," Larry said.

"We can help it though," Bohar broke in. "We have the means and ways of making them work. First, let us get the formula."

An hour later they returned from the bank in question. It had been a proud structure of financial strength. But the architect who designed it did not think that one day it might have to withstand the pound of a bomb the likes of which he could never have imagined. So when Larry and the others arrived at the place where once it stood they were stopped by members of the security patrol. The whole area was in a state of wreckage. Not a single building in the block on which the bank had stood, had survived in entirety the blast of the bomb.

The five men stood looking at the blasted row of buildings. Larry didn't care one way or the other about their being razed, except that he knew people had been working in them at the time of the bomb burst. Not a single one of these people had survived.

But deep down in the vaults, many feet below the level of the street, the precious bonds and cash and securities lay snug in their fire-proof boxes. Once they had meant security or wealth or power. Now they were meaningless bits of paper.

"That's going to be a job, finding the formula," Larry said. "I remember the box number but look at the wreckage! It'll take weeks to get to it."

BOHAR'S expression became thoughtful. It was obvious Larry spoke the truth. Then it became simply a switch in plan. Bohar had intended Larry to stay and work in the laboratory and manufacturing end. Now Larry had best go to this jungle country.

"....It's been a long time since I was there last," Larry said on hearing Bohar's suggestion.

"Well, it will only be for the two weeks or so it will take to get to the vault. Further, with you acting as a sort of good-will ambassador the natives will not mind working for us later."

"Look, Bohar," Larry suddenly decided to get to the root of the matter. "What is with this gum business? Who gets it and for what?"

Bohar smiled. Did this Earthling think him fool enough to tell the reason? "That, Higgins, is no concern of yours. Just make as much of it as we want and all will be well with you and yours."

Larry shrugged his shoulders. It was all right with him. But deep within his mind the germ of escape and freedom and revenge had embedded itself. And little by little it was coming to life. Larry had been far removed from the carnage. A sky wagon blowing up in a vast sheet of flame somehow had no personal meaning to him. It was like seeing it on the theatre television. But watching a man dying from a gunshot wound, a man who lay on the ground two feet from where you were lying was another matter. Then, too, love had come upon him with all its demands, frustrations and hopes. Faith's father had consecrated his life to the goal of avenging the peoples of the Earth.

And suddenly what should have been obvious from the beginning be-

came so at this moment for Larry Higgins. Life could have no meaning for anyone unless one was free to pursue happiness in a free world. The world was no longer free. But there were still men in the world. And so long as there were, then the world could be made safe again.

From that moment on Larry dedicated himself to the task of freeing the world....

"All right," Larry said. "If that's the way it is. Now about getting to Honduras and getting the gum from the trees. When do we start? How many men can I depend on? Are they laborers? What about my wife and her family?"

Bohar took Larry's arm and walked back with him to the car. He talked as they strolled: "There will be no dearth of laborers, Higgins. As for your wife and her family, they will remain here, naturally. Strange ideas strike men's minds suddenly. I dislike the thought of a change of heart on your part. Therefore, to ensure your devotion to our cause, your wife will remain with us until your work has been accomplished."

Larry's features were under control. Not a muscle or nerve quivered, though he was screaming inside of him. His tone was quite casual, as he said on reaching the car:

"Keep in mind that these natives are creatures of impulse. They will die gladly and willingly and heroically if they think they have been wronged. I do not want their actions misconstrued as being mine."

"Only if their actions stem from stimuli of your prompting. But we speak in circles. I will be a fair and impartial judge of your accomplishments," Bohar said as they entered the car. "Now let us talk of what you will need in the jungles...."

LARRY HIGGINS looked with jaundiced eyes on the huge stockade which had been erected in the heart of the jungle. Bohar had promised all the laborers Larry would need. Nor had he reneged. He had simply forgotten to say what kind they would be. There were five thousand men, women and children in the stockade.

Guarding them was a small army of ten thousand men under the leadership of Captain Helat.

The guard at the gate came to attention as Larry and Helat approached. Helat gestured for Larry to precede him. The guard opened the gate and Larry was the familiar rows of barbed wire separating the prisoners' compound from the officer's quarters. Towers had been constructed on which a twenty-four-hour patrol was kept. Searchlights made day of night and swung their billion-candle light to and fro in search of some poor human worm who might attempt escape. The guns of the guards would make mincemeat of the man or woman who tried.

"By the six-headed God!" Helat exclaimed, wiping his brow with his forearm. "I'm glad this is done. Now we can get to the natives, I hope. What do you think, Higgins?"

It had been a long while since Larry had been down in the jungle, and he had been little more than a boy at the time. Being younger he had managed to learn more words and phrases than he would had he been older. Larry felt he could still make himself understood, especially if the old chief, Mendez, was still there.

These strangers from another universe had understood English. But would they understand the speech of these natives? Larry would have to take a chance on it.

"Any time you're ready," Larry said.

"Very well. We'll start at dawn tomorrow. I hate this steaming heat. On the other hand I hate the jungle night even more. There is no choice, is there? I saw the most enormous bug I'd ever seen in all my life, this morning. The thing was almost a foot across. Simply enormous. It was lying across a band of sunlight in my room. And eating at this horror was a lesser horror, but a few inches long. It was eating away at this huge bug. And do you know what the large bug was doing all the while? It was feeding on some sugar which had fallen from my spoon. That's why I hate the jungle night. I think I'm afraid more of the unseen things than I am of the more fearsome creatures of the light. Tell me, Higgins. Do men grow..." Helat stopped suddenly, as though realizing how foolish he must have sounded to the other.

But Larry saw the rambling, meaningless talk in another light. Helat, the stiff man of arms, was breaking. This was but the first sign. There would be other signs later. The jungle could affect men like that.

"Do men grow what?" Larry asked.

"Nothing!" Helat said. "I'll issue orders...."

"What kind of orders?" Larry asked. "There will be just a few of us going."

"A few! Nonsense! There should be, at the very least, an entire company. We'll take along twenty or so of the slave laborers. We'll need them for the heavy work."

"Twenty!" Larry said kiddingly. "Why only twenty? I'd say a hundred should be more like it."

"Then we'll take a hundred!" Helat said. "Perhaps you're right. My men like this heat as little as I do."

LARRY TURNED away and strolled to where his cot was—he and Captain Helat shared the cabin the laborers had constructed for them—and stretched himself on it. A million thoughts ran through his mind. Quick bright thoughts of Faith; frightening thoughts of what failure could mean to them all; thoughts of the morrow when a hundred laborers would share the jungle trail with them; thoughts of the strange jungle tribes, superstitious and wary of the white man. But Helat saw nothing for Larry had turned his face to the wall.

Helat took a last look outside, yawned and prepared to make out his daily report to Bohar. There was nothing exciting to report, Helat thought. These Earthlings had no fight in them. The only ones who had shown some sort of spirit were the ones in the subway, when Higgins had been taken. But these in the stockade. H'm! The women were good for but one thing and the men for whatever menial work had to be done. Here they were in the jungle a full week. God of Gods! A beastly thing, this jungle. Helat was thankful Mu had nothing like it.

He smiled to himself at something Bohar had mentioned before they had left. He had been sure the High Priest would fall in with the suggestion he was going to make. That the Earth be used as a penal colony. And this jungle, Helat thought, would be the worst punishment a man could have.

He pulled the light cord after filing the last page and settled himself to slumber. This night it came quickly.

But it did not come so quickly for Larry Higgins. Just as his head settled firmly on the thin pillow, a sudden and mystifying thing happened. It was as though he heard Faith's voice. *"Do not worry, my dear. Do not worry! We will be all right..."*

His head came away from the pil-

low in a single swift movement. And as he stared into the sudden jungle night, he wondered whether he too had succumbed to the jungle madness....

TODO, HIGH PRIEST of Mu, did not look happy. The swift-as-light flight had distressed him—he had never liked flying—and besides, Todo was a sensual man who liked food and women to excess. It showed on his great bulk and in his small piggish eyes, and in the quirk he had of rolling a thick tongue over his lips.

He sat beside Mu in the Emperor's personal chamber. Only Mu's Chamberlain was present, and he in a distant manner, for he was at the far end of the room.

"Greatness," Todo said. "The news that Bohar must have for me must be of the highest importance. For surely he knew of Todo's dislike of travel. Does his Greatness know of this tidbit, also?"

"Yes. I know of it. Bohar has it in mind to make a colony of this planet that is called Earth."

Todo's eyebrows shot upward in parenthesis marks above his small round eyes.

"A colony, eh? H'm. Our friend, Bohar, does nothing without a good reason behind his deed. Colony.... H'm. Penal colony, probably. But what of the gum? News comes slowly."

"A stroke of good fortune attended us. The six-headed God is surely looking down upon us with grace. We captured—but the tale is too long in the telling. Bohar's aide, Captain Helat, is down in some jungle or other with Lawrence Higgins, the son of the Higgins of the gum. They went there to facilitate the manufacture of the gum."

Their talk was interrupted while the Chamberlain had servants bring

food for Todo. Mu ate sparingly but the High Priest gorged himself, as always. A final belch, a last swipe at his mouth and chin with a napkin and Todo was done.

"That was excellent!" Todo said. "Excellent! But is it not time for His Greatness to partake of his medicine?"

"Yes," Mu said in somewhat bitter tones. "In a very short time. Aah! It has arrived."

The Chamberlain was coming forward carrying a server with a glass of water resting on it. Bowing low before Mu he extended the glass. Mu took the glass with its milky liquid and swallowed it in a single gulp.

"Bah! This stuff stinks!" Mu growled. "And they tell me there is the equivalent of ten thousand sticks of gum in that glass, for that many were used to get the six ounces it contained."

"So I understand," Todo shook his head to and fro, his dewlaps slapping against his jaws, so large were they. "But His Greatness' illness cannot be cured with any other medicine."

"Sometimes I wonder," Mu said. "I remember well the first time they brought the syrupy stuff to me. Bah!"

TODO WAS about to say something when again they were interrupted, this time by Bohar. The two men watched the Chancellor approach and looked at each other in surprise. Was this Bohar, the sly one, the smiling one? It couldn't be! He was not smiling, quite the reverse in fact. There was a thundercloud of anger on his brow.

"Who gave orders to let the prisoners go in the city of New York?" he asked sharply.

Mu sat stiff and straight. A bright light of anger burned in his eyes. Even **Todo** was amazed that Bohar should

forget himself so. This was decidedly not the way to curry favor.

"Does Bohar question his Emperor's doings?" Mu asked softly.

"So it was you!" Bohar gritted. "Do you know what you've done? They were but waiting for something like this to happen. Buttered you up nicely, maneuvered you into doing exactly the thing they had planned on. Listen, then. The entire garrison of the city was wiped out. They have captured the entire arms depot and supplies of that city. Besides which we lost in killed and wounded a half million men. Does that make *His Greatness* feel better?"

Todo looked startled at the news. But Mu still sat stiff and straight and unconcerned. "Bohar," Mu said softly. "I once said that the day would come when you would say the one thing, commit the one act which would change things for you. You have. Chamberlain! Call the guard! This man is under arrest."

"Save your breath," Bohar said. "My men are out there. Men loyal to me. This buffoonery is going to stop. Emperors and High Priests. Bah! Sick men and scoundrels. Why do you think I wanted Todo here? On Mu he would be a source of danger. Once I have accomplished my task all will go well.

"Whatever men are here are mine, from Hunto and his companion Admiral, to the lowest sub-altern. Even the physicians. You fool! Did it not occur to you that you felt better from a single piece of gum? We could have had all we wanted by sending a half dozen disks across the great void. The idea of this great expedition on the pretext of getting the entire supply of this Chicle Gum was mine. Now why don't you ask me why? For what purpose?"

Neither of the two men listening to Bohar rave was a fool, though as he had said, one was sick and the other a scoundrel. They knew Bohar had some ulterior motive, but what it was escaped them.

"I'll tell you! There is but one man fit to rule the Universe. Bohar! I alone have the capacity for ruling! For I alone have no emotions, no personal desires. I alone know the abstract basis for ruling. Simply put, this is revolt. I should have you strung up by your fingers for what you allowed to happen. Now we must enforce by terror what we could have done by simple force and persuasion.

"We are three million against several hundred million. Fortunately the greater part of these will not be able to take part in any action against us. And fortunately also, we have the greater strength of weapons, but I am not underestimating the enemy. As you did, Mu. As for both of you, because you are still symbols to the people of Mu I will let you live. But the instant either of you tries anything against the common good I will see to it, personally, that death by torture will be your lot. Now I must return to Hunto and Suta and plan the future. This revolt against my authority must be nipped before it spreads."

"I still say," Mu said as the slender figure of Bohar passed from view, "that some day he will make the mistake I have waited for him to make. He cannot travel a straight line. And someone will lay more traps than he suspects and catch him by his heels. Todo! We must somehow circumvent his mad desires."

But the High Priest knew it was going to be a great deal more difficult than Mu thought. Bohar had seen from the very beginning that the one who held the balance of power held the armed forces. No, Todo continued

thinking on the same tangent, Bohar was in the saddle to stay, unless....

THERE WAS no *unless* in Bohar's mind as he ordered his chauffeur to drive to the Stevens Hotel. He was thinking far in advance. He knew that already the fall of the city of New York to the rebels was common knowledge. He had something less than three million men at his disposal and he could not spread them across the whole continent. Certain areas had to be held at all costs. They could lose all of the West Coast and a good part of the South and still hold control. Just so long as the cities of the East and Middle West remained in their hands. Hunto and his immense air fleet would form a barrier against which nothing could avail.

The car stopped with a shrieking of breaks and a suddenness which threw Bohar forward in a heap.

"Down, sir!" the chauffeur warned. "Trouble ahead."

Bohar scrambled to a sitting position and peered through the windshield. As the driver had said, trouble lay ahead. Bohar had instructed the driver to get to the Stevens as quickly as he could and the man had taken a short cut. The short cut lay through a district that was used for containing prisoners. It was heavily patrolled, with mounted guns on almost every street corner, and with towers on every strategic spot. Fifty thousand male prisoners were held in an area about four blocks square.

Among them was the father of Faith Burns. He had never given up either the thought of escape or the hope of overthrowing the power of these invaders from space. Little by little he had formed a corps of men who would fight to the death, who would take any risk or chance. These men he had placed in spots which

would be the first to be thrown against the guards. The armory where the guns were kept was almost in the very center of the huge area.

The fall of New York to the Earthmen had come over the grapevine the night before. Ed Burns knew that there was no time to lose. They had to keep the enemy off-balance from now on. So he had sent out his messengers to the entire camp; the time to strike was at hand, during the hour before dawn.

They fell upon the camp guards like avenging angels. In short order the guards were stripped of their weapons. The blow fell swiftly and silently. Burns had foreseen that there would be little noise. The guns the enemy used were silent.

At the same time the camp guards were attacked, picked squads of men attacked the towers which were made of wood. Fires were started against the wooden framework of these towers. Other squads of men attacked the various gun posts through the area. From the being confined to certain areas the fighting spread over the entire compound. It was the way Burns intended it. For many of the prisoners were to escape, but this time they would be armed. He intended the entire city to blaze with the fires of revolt....

It was on this scene Bohar came.

"We had better get out of here, sir," the driver said.

"No. Not for a moment. We are safe here. There is a company of men coming up in trucks. I suppose the alarms have been sent out.... H'm. Bring the commander to me, and also the commander of the camp, if he is still alive—"

THE TWO men stood stiff as ramrods before Bohar. The commander of the company of soldiers which

had just arrived looked straight at Bohar, but he could see his fellow officer from the corner of his eye. The man was fairly trembling.

Bohar paced back and forth before the two.

"....This bungling and mollycoddling must stop! These Earthlings must know we are the masters. They have been petted long enough. Who was the ringleader of the group?"

"A man named, Burns, sir," the officer, a Captain, said.

"Again Burns. Well, this time there will be no reprieve. I want him taken, alive preferably, and brought to me. As for the others, hunt them down, every man, and put them to death...."

"I think we had better leave this area, sir," said the second officer. "They've taken several gun posts and we are in range of their fire."

"Blast them!" Bohar said viciously. "Every man. Get rid of the vermin. Lieutenant:—"

"Sir....?"

"You will be in command here. Call for as many men as you need. I will see to it Admiral Suta sends them."

Both officers saluted as Bohar called for his driver to get out of the area.

Bohar's headquarters was a beehive of activity. Messengers and couriers streamed in and out of the vast buildings. The guards were on alert and ready for any emergency. On the floors of the staff Hunto and Suta waited for Bohar's arrival. They had been apprised of the revolt and had already taken measures to repress it. But they had also discovered it was not to be done easily. There were many spots in the city where men had been waiting for this moment. And these men were willing to risk everything to gain their ends. The whole city blazed with revolt.

The door opened with a crash and Bohar strode into the room.

"Fools!" he grated as he stepped to the table at which they were seated and searched them with his eyes. "Fools! They'll set fire to the city if we don't stop them. Not that I care. For all of me they can burn it to the ground. But we can't let them. No doubt the entire middle area is aware of what is going on here.

"I want every man out. I want this thing broken, and broken in such a way as to serve as warning forever. No one is to be spared, neither man, woman nor child. All are to be put to death."

Hunto and the other went pale. These measures were far more stringent than they would have advised. As usual, Hunto took the lead:

"If I may offer a word of caution, Bohar—"

"Caution be hanged! There has been too much of it. That is why the fiasco at New York took place. That is why these vermin have had the chance to get their work in here. Break them, and in such a way they will never again dare to try to test the bonds of our strength."

Hunto and Suta looked quickly at each other.

"What of Mu and Todo?" the Admiral of the air fleet asked.

"A mistake on my part. I should never have let them come. Mu and his lack of sugar. . . . Bah! It were better he would have died of his illness. I should have taken command on Mu. Then we wouldn't have had to go through the subterfuges we did. This business of the gum. The ten thousand men Captain Helat has in the jungle would be of better use here."

"Have you heard from Helat?" Hunto asked.

"Yes. They are going into the jungle

at last and contact the natives. Which reminds me. I owe something to Higgins. He asked me to make it easy on his father-in-law. I must do as he asked. When he is brought in I must make it easy for the man as I can. Hah! And for Higgins' wife, also.

"But that can wait for the moment. Have the men in the jungle recalled. But first tell Helat I want every one of the prisoners put to death, including this Higgins."

UP AHEAD, where there was no path, the prisoners chopped with the heavy jungle knives. Larry and Captain Helat were at the head of the long column of men and materials. The jungle steamed with heat and the men were stained with sweat and dirt. Mosquitoes buzzed all about them, and every leaf, every bush, held a quota of insects which bit and stung and sucked.

"Better call a halt," Larry suggested. "I'd say it was about mid-day."

Helat shook his head weakly. He was too tired to talk. He was so tired, in fact, that he had allowed Larry to take over command of the column. And Larry had given orders Helat had no knowledge of. A surprising number of the prisoners carried arms.

Larry called ahead for the men to stop their chopping. He waited for the main body to come up, then ordered a clearing made. Their food did not have to be prepared and water was carried in containers which kept it cool and did not permit loss by evaporation. In a remarkably short time, an orderly camp was struck. Captain Helat ate and retired to his tent for a short nap.

Larry, however, had more on his mind than sleep. This whole expedition was going exactly as he had planned. The killed warriors did not

take to the jungle. Larry gathered there were no such tropic regions on Mu, and from the first day the terribly moist heat had taken its toll. It was hard enough on the prisoners but, fortunately, they were old hands in the jungle. The men of Mu had wanted to return to Chicago from the very first day.

Larry gave orders which scattered the men, immediately after lunch. He saw to it that a few of the prisoners, key men to his plan, stayed in camp, on the pretext he had some work for them to do. Helat was still asleep. And Larry had free rein.

He waited until he was certain no one could observe his movements, then made his rendezvous. The ten men he had selected to act as his lieutenants were awaiting him in the glade he had chosen for their meeting. He got right down to business.

"Tonight. At supper time. The men of Mu will be in a state of collapse. They should succumb easily enough. I will take care of Captain Helat. Now each of you will have a squad of nine men. There are five hundred of the others. H'm! Better wait until they go to bed. It will be easier and less risky. Use the machetes on them. Jones...."

"Yes, sir," said Jones, a stocky man whose dark face was almost burned black by the sun.

"Your squad will have rifles. See to it that the rest are covered should some of the kilted boys escape. Got it?"

"Yes, sir! And don't worry. Our fingers have been itching for a long time."

"Good. The signal for the fiesta will be when I step out in front of our tent. Watch for it. I had my tent placed so that it's in a patch of open ground. There will be a moon tonight

so everyone will be able to see me. Now back to camp everyone...."

CAPTAIN HELAT, marks of fatigue showing in the deep circles about his eyes and the lines which suddenly were on his cheeks, lay back on his cot. Larry sat beside him, a glass of water in his hand. The jungle knife was in its sheath at his side. Larry was talking:

"I've been curious about this gum business from the very first. Be a good fellow and tell me what it's all about, Helat."

"Oh! The gum again, eh? Well, why not? Won't do any harm, that I can see." Happened a few years back. His Greatness became ill. For a long time they could not make out what it was. Then one of the physicians made the discovery that His Greatness lacked sugar. Completely. The strange part of it was that the sugar we had on Mu was not the same that would benefit him. The search for the particular type of sugar which would help went on for years. And finally exploratory discs came back from this planet and, in a stick of something called gum, was found the substance.

"His Greatness chewed the gum and immediately he felt better. It became obvious then what had to be done. I don't understand one fact. His Greatness felt better with the chewing of one stick. Later I was told they had to use the equivalent of ten thousand sticks to make the proper emulsion for him.... But that is the way of science, I suppose."

To Larry it made no sense at all. But he had asked the question for two reasons, one, information; the other, to tire Helat. He achieved his purpose. Helat lay back, sighed deeply and said:

"Even talking tires me." He became petulant. "I do wish you wouldn't

bother me any more, Higgins."

"I won't," Larry said. "Here's some water. Drink."

Captain Helat leaned forward to take the glass. It was the last known act of his life. For as he leaned forward, Larry slipped the jungle knife from its sheath and sliced it straight across Helat's throat. The head rolled away from the trunk in a fountain of blood. Larry stepped aside, looked down at the headless body, and moved out to the tent opening, and after a deep breath, stood directly between the flaps.

The prisoners moved with the stealth of animals. Now and then one stepped into a sliver of moonlight and the cold steel glinted evilly in the light. The tents were arranged in a semicircle. It was frightening to watch as the men stole into the tents. For a short time later they would appear again, usually wiping the blades on their trouser legs. Now and then someone awakened, but only in time to receive a death blow. Suddenly Larry became aware of a peculiar smell. For an instant he felt nausea. The odor he had smelled was that of blood, a great deal of it.

He stepped forward to where Jones and his men had suddenly appeared from the darkness and taken over their watch. They carried rifles and their eyes were intent on the scene before them. They waited, silent and watchful, until the last of the Earthmen stepped from the last of the tents.

The carnage was frightful and complete. Not a man of Mu escaped.

Immediately, Larry ordered the trail back to camp. But now it was a different story. For each of his men carried five rifles, enough to arm every man in camp. Even their manner was different. Once more they were men, not beasts of burden, slaves to these strangers from another planet. Larry

felt the change, knew it was the beginning of a brighter, more purposeful day. These men did not frighten easily.

THE TRIP back was done in half a day where up it had taken a full day. The night was still with them when they returned to the clearing at the beginning of the camp. Larry halted them while they were still a hundred yards from the nearest sentinel. From experience Larry knew most of the guards would be asleep. He wanted them all asleep, the sleep of eternity.

One by one the men he designated slipped off into the darkness. And later, one by one they returned. One and all had the same story. The camp now lay completely unguarded. But that was only the first step. The others would be more risky, and less likely to succeed so completely. When Larry sent off the men he wanted toward the prisoner's compound, he had but twenty five men left. But these were all ex-army men, sharpshooters, all.

Now when they followed Larry they moved warily. At the very edge of the clearing Larry gave them a signal. The entire group fell to the earth and began a slow crawl to the very center of the clearing, just beyond the place where the barbed wire stretched. The men he had sent ahead had cut it so that getting in was easy.

The towers gleamed starkly skeletal in the moonlight. And like the spokes of a gigantic wheel twenty five men lay stretched out on the ground. The hub of the wheel was Larry and a picked group of five men. And now the real waiting began. For the men Larry had sent ahead had to awaken, arm, and send to safety the women and children. Larry knew the terrible anger they nursed, for there would be many women missing. Helat had seen

to it that many of his men did not lack for pleasure, even in the jungle.

They could see the women and children race off into the jungle. And now the men appeared and ran forward to wait until all were assembled. This was the crucial moment. For in the confusion, were they discovered now, many would die needlessly, sitting ducks for the guards on the towers. It was as guard against that, that Larry and his crew kept watch.

LUCK HELD with them to the very end. The last of the men prisoners had been assembled and handed a rifle when the guards on one of the towers decided to take a look around and turned on the searchlight. His shout echoed the shot which smashed the glass in the searchlight and broke the bulb. Then it was that Larry's strategy in using sharpshooters for the job worked to perfection. The kilted guards didn't stand a chance.

The smashing sound of the huge glass face breaking awakened the rest of the camp. The men of Mu raced from their tents and were met by the withering fire of the loosed prisoners. They fell by the hundreds at the first volley. Larry had ordered the camp set afire and men raced with blazing torches through the tented area, hurling the burning brands against the canvas tents, creating a blazing inferno.

The kilted warriors were sharp marks nor was there a single spot in which they could find safety. And at the end there were but a few who managed to find safety in the jungle. Larry didn't care about those. The natives would find them, the natives, the mosquitoes, and the wild animals.

Larry worked with machine-like precision and speed. There was still a large job ahead of him. He had mapped his campaign well. Mexico

would provide the base for operations. Larry had not spent his time in vain. Pretending admiration for the way the men of Mu had conquered, Larry had milked Helat of all the information the man had, and being aide to Bohar, Helat knew a great deal.

Bohar had garrisons only in the Middle West and East. The whole South and West was free. But Bohar did assign part of the air fleet to guard the coast line. The entire center of the country was open to invasion. Help could be gotten in Mexico, for Helat had mentioned that they had recently heard of angry voices being raised against them from south of the border. All this had been grist for the future Larry was planning.

Now Larry was ready to start. Two space ships were at an air port near the capitol city of Honduras. Larry had made it a point to sit with the pilot on one of the ships. The pilot had allowed Larry that privilege on hearing Larry had been a member of the air force. He had even shown Larry how to use the instruments. Nor had Larry forgotten.

BELOW, RINGED by the eternal mountains, lay Mexico City. Larry brought the ship down as if he had been born to the controls. He had been afraid to call in for fear his call might be monitored. So when he rolled the ship in toward the hangar he found it not unusual that of the faces he saw not a single one wore a smile of welcome. It was not until they started to disembark that the employees of the airport noticed the men with guns, the women and children. In a matter of minutes the ex-prisoners were surrounded by a screaming, gesticulating mob. The news spread like wildfire....

Later, after the women and children had been placed where food would be

made available to them, and clothes, Larry and a few others were taken to the General of the area. It was there Larry heard for the first time that New York had revolted successfully and that other cities had attempted to follow, some successfully, others not.

For a long moment Larry was afraid to ask the question. The dark-faced man in the uniform of the Mexican Air Force guessed that there was something amiss. His intent features softened as he searched Larry's face.

"Did the people of Chicago revolt also....?" Larry stammered.

"Yes...."

"Was it successful?"

The General did not answer for a moment....

FAITH BURNS finished reading the letter. She laid it gently down among her things on the dresser top and found herself, after a moment, staring absently into the mirror. She shook herself and grinned at her reflection.

"Like it, don't you?" she said. "And what makes you think you're different from any other woman who receives love letters? Well.... Some don't love the men they get them from. And you....?"

She looked deeply into her own eyes and as if she had read the answer she wanted, she felt the sudden heat rise to her face.

"—Yes. I love him. I guess I loved him from the first moment I saw him, so pale and drawn from what he had gone through. But he's strong and honest and true, and a loveable fool. Don't worry, Larry love. I'll be waiting until you get back. No matter how long it will take."

Her eyes widened as the door swung inward and a half dozen men stepped into the room. Four remained at the door while two of them stepped for-

ward and took her arms. Faith had been in the midst of dressing and she tried to cover her partial nudity with her arms but they dragged her away, roughing her as they did.

"Where are we going?" she managed to get out.

"To where women like you belong," one of the men said.

"How dare you?" she tried to hold back but was forced to come along. "How dare you? I will see Bohar about this."

One of the men laughed. "Bohar ordered this," said the second of the two.

She felt fear then. Not for herself but for Larry. She knew why she had been forced to remain, as hostage. Had Larry done something which incurred the disfavor of Bohar? Was he hurt or.... She put the thought from her. No! He was all right. He had to be!

She looked up and saw they were before Bohar's apartment. It opened after a moment and the two guards shoved her in. Bohar was pacing back and forth, his hands clasped behind him. He passed her several times but seemed unaware of her presence. At last he paused in his wild pacing and looked at her.

"I had you brought here first, to tell you some things you should know. First, as soon as my men find your father, he will be brought to me and I will personally direct the dismemberment of his body. Second, that fool of a husband of yours is quite dead by now...."

SHE SEEMED to be drifting in a pool of midnight blackness. It was so peaceful, the waters so placid.... But there was something she had forgotten she had to do. It had to do with something about Larry. Larry...? But he was dead. Yes! *He was dead! Dead, dead, deadeadead.*

"Larry! Larry, my own! No! No! He can't be. He hasn't lived yet!" She heard someone's voice screaming, and opened her eyes. She was lying on the floor in Bohar's apartment and it had been she who had been screaming.

"Get her up," Bohar said coldly, "and take her to the place of the concubines and tell the chief concubine to prepare her for one of the lesser courtiers."

The darkness into which she had fallen settled about her again. But this time she was conscious. A strange soft smile of emptiness was on her lips as they led her away. And this time they did not have to drag her. The blessed insane go willingly, if their dreams are of the past and are sweet....

Bohar watched coldly as they took the girl away. He sniffed loudly as he turned to the reports which had been coming to him every few minutes. Anger darkened his face as he read. He would have to call in the air force and blast the devils. It meant wrecking the city but better than that a successful revolt.

He reached for the phone and called Hunto's headquarters. The Admiral of the Air was out for the moment and Bohar slammed the phone down in petulant anger. The instant he put it down it rang. He lifted it and an excited voice said:

"Excellency! I have distressing news. Burns escaped our trap. We thought we had him but lost him at the last second. But it won't be long before his capture. He *can't* escape us again."

Bohar felt a great weariness settle over him. He nodded to himself as he placed the phone on its cradle. Men like Burns, he realized, could **make** the best plans go awry. They

never gave up.... Then his mouth tightened until it was a thin bloodless line across his face. Blast him! Bohar had not gone this far to be thwarted.

He lifted his head at the sound of a knock at his door. Calling to the one on the other side to come in, Bohar was surprised to see Suta enter. There was a grim look in the man's eyes and to his mouth.

"Bohar," Suta said in his low calm voice. "We are risking destruction by staying here."

"How do you mean?" Bohar asked.

"The revolt is spreading. Our security intelligence in the old capitol city of Washington reports that some of the members of the ruling body escaped and are now on the west coast somewhere, directing the revolt. These people have no fear of dying. They are possessed by the wild fanatical belief of some sort of freedom they once possessed and have lost because of us. And we *cannot* fight on all the fronts."

"Then smash them to bits with air power! Smash their cities. Smash their villages, every hovel and hut. Kill them all!"

Suta's eyes narrowed. Was Bohar losing his mind? Doing what he suggested would take every ship they had, and more. This wasn't Mu, with its dozen cities. There were hundreds of cities on this continent alone.

AS QUICKLY as the mood of intense anger came to Bohar, so quickly did it go. And once more he was the cold, calculating individual. "Forgive me," Bohar said. "I spoke in great haste. What lies in your mind to do?"

"Return to Mu," Suta said.

"But..." Bohar began.

"It is foolish to remain. Already we have had very bad losses. We can clothe His Greatness in the raiment

of old, but we would still hold the strings of power. As for Todo, he is no fool. So long as he had what was always his, with the exception of being an actual dictator, he also would go along. Why stay here? The tale we made about the gum can be unmade as easily. I say let us leave."

"And Hunto?" Bohar said casually.

"Hunto.... Hunto will listen to whatever you say and agree to it," Suta said.

Bohar was silent for a moment. Suta knew what thoughts were in his mind. The casual question about where Hunto stood did not fool Suta. He knew Bohar was weighing his chances on pitting one against the other. But Suta did not care. His armies were being chopped to bits because Bohar wanted to run the whole show. And Bohar simply did not have the military background to do so.

"Tell me frankly, Suta, dear friend. Do you think we have a good chance of winning out?"

"I don't know. But this I will say. Leave the running of the land forces to me, and things might go better."

Bohar turned from him and went back to his favorite chair. It faced the lake and for a long minute Bohar sat and stared at the blue waters below. He kept turning over the facts Suta had marshalled against staying. Bohar hated to leave, even though staying meant nothing any more. He had accomplished his desires. Mu was Emperor in name only, as was Todo the High Priest. A stick of chewing gum brought back by a disc had done it for him.

Yet it rankled that men like Burns and Higgins defied him.

"Well then, if retreat we must, how do we go about it?" Bohar asked, turning his head toward the soldierly-looking man.

"Recall whatever corps are outside the city. We will need every man, especially construction men. Airports must be constructed to accommodate our entire fleet. I will throw a ring of steel around this city, so powerful no army or group of armies will be able to get through. We will dismantle the ray weapons from the ships and mount them against the enemy. Returning will be a simple matter. There will be no air force to face us on the way back. As for the ray machines, we can destroy them before we leave."

"I don't know why," Bohar said, "but I have a feeling Suta is frightened of the enemy."

"Only a complete fool would say he had no fear in him. I am not frightened of these Earthlings. But to say I have no fear of the future would be denying the fact."

"So-o! Perhaps Suta has become too old for the...."

"Hold!" Suta said in strident tones. "I did not come here to bandy words, talk has always been Bohar's forte. I had my say, nor do I intend to say more. Good day, Excellency!"

BOHAR STARED at the blank face of the door for a long while. His mind was in a ferment. Where had he bungled? Were things starting to fall apart for him? Why? He had planned well and long and signs had more than led him to believe he would win out. Had it been Burns or Higgins....? He shook his head fiercely at the thought. Nonsense! Besides, he had won out against them in the end. The girl was quite mad, and Higgins, why Higgins should no longer be in the land of the living.

He jerked at the sudden clamor of the phone's ring. Lifting it he waited for the other to begin. And when the talk stopped at the other end Bohar knew in every dreadful detail about

the swift massacre of the jungle garrison.

For a short moment Bohar became quite insane. He ripped the phone from the wires, tore it free and hurled it through the window. The tinkle of glass on the floor, and the rush of footsteps outside the door brought him out of it.

"It was nothing," he told the guards who swarmed in. "Nothing. Go back to your posts."

And now, Bohar thought darkly, I must worry about Higgins, also....

LARRY HIGGINS had aged ten years in the long moment after General Gonsales told of what happened in Chicago. The General did not know whether Burns had escaped, but it was decidedly against the odds that he had. Larry knew what Bohar would do to Faith.

"General Gonsales," Larry began. "I have dedicated my life to the task of ridding our lands of these kilted monsters from this planet of Mu. Call on me for what you will, and on those I brought with me. We stand ready to do anything in our power."

Gonsales accepted their services instantly. He was in receipt of a communique from headquarters in San Francisco that they were but waiting the last delivery of ships from the Los Angeles area and all would be in readiness. General Hooker would be only too glad to get men like this Higgins and his crew.

"Very well, Higgins," said the General. "I leave tomorrow for the border. Come along and bring your men. There will be many there like yourself. I think General Hooker of the American forces will be glad to have you."

Larry was amazed at what was going on in both Los Angeles and San Francisco. The whole countryside was alive with soldiers in uniform. Not

only soldiers but planes. As he waited for the General's aide to arrive, Larry counted the weeks since he had landed in Chicago. Eight weeks had gone by. It seemed like eight years. Then Major Wilks, General Hooker's aide, stepped into the hotel room Larry had been given, and advanced on Larry with outstretched hand.

"A pleasure and honor both!" Wilks exclaimed. "So good knowing you, Colonel Higgins."

Larry blinked at the words. Colonel Higgins!

"Don't be so surprised that your exploits have become well-known. Men have escaped and told of the magnificent defense of the subway. And the Honduran incident is too recent not to have made a heroic figure of you. The General sends his regards and asks would you have dinner with him tonight?"

"It would be an honor," Larry said.

"Good. Then we will be expecting you. Eight sharp, on the post. I will have a car pick you up."

There were many at the dinner Larry did not know. One man in particular seemed to stand out. He was of slightly more than middle years, grey, distinguished in a hard-bitten sort-of way. Later, Larry learned this man was the provisional president, James Gilbert, a little-known Senator from Nebraska who by the force of his personality and will and intelligence had rallied the peoples of the country.

After dinner General Hooker and a dozen other officers, including Larry, went into another room, on the General's request. There was a single large table at which were drawn up enough chairs for the men. A couple of enlisted men served as recorders. Huge maps hung from the three free walls. One was a sky map; the others

were detailed topographical maps.

"Zero hour is at nine-hours," General hooker began. "Generals Gonzales, Duvido and Cumberland will meet at my quarters at zero three hours. The rest of you will wait final instructions. All but Colonel Higgins. Colonel Higgins. I have placed you in command of our air fleet. It will be your job to land commando forces in the number of two hundred thousand in an area ten miles square. Think you can do it?"

"Parachute, sir?"

"No. Land them and their equipment."

"If I have coverage I can."

"There may not be."

Larry thought that over. It could be done all right. But what a job. And there might be a hell a lot of losses.

"One question more, sir."

"Shoot."

"Will the area be free of the enemy?"

"Yes. Our men in the Chicago area have their orders. They will make sure that the ground will be free."

"Good! We'll come in, sir."

"Better get some rest. You start taking off at zero five...."

ED BURNS peered from behind the hedge at the huge field. Once it had been the largest airport in the whole country. But now the huge runways were used as parade grounds for the large garrison of soldiers stationed there. Weeds grew knee-high in many places. But Burns saw that planes could still land. He crawled backward and joined the hundred others who were waiting for the dawn to come. Three miles farther on, the main body of those who were to make sure that the field was clear for the air fleet waited.

"The power house is that big one to

the left. We take it first. Make sure that it goes up but good. Joe, it'll be your job to knock off the arms depot. You've got the stuff to do it with. I'll take care of the communications hut. All right, men, let's go."

They were shadows slipping along the ground, grotesque and frightening. Each man was armed with a rifle, a knife and a bag of high explosive. These were the pick of the guerillas. Not a man of them but did not have a personal reason for killing. Most of them had lost a member of the family to the torturers of Bohar, and some had lost several. Burns was still in the dark about Faith and his wife. He had heard from neither in many weeks. He knew Larry was safe, and felt a great deal of pride in his son-in-law's accomplishment.

But that was something else to Burns. For Ed Burns had gone mad. Mad in the way of vengeance. He lived for the day when he would meet Bohar face to face, preferably in a closed room.

He crawled in the lead of his squad, a knife gripped firmly between his teeth. He could not hear the others but knew they were close by his side. Now and then they stopped their snake-like movement as a sentry passed close to them. But for the most part they did not pause for anything. And shortly, the squat shape of the communications building was casting its shadow about them.

Burns waved his men in, whispered instructions, and waited for the sound of the power house going sky high. He counted patiently. His timing was perfect. He had given them thirty seconds in which to get their work done. They had come in on the nose. The first tremendous blast had not lost its echo and Burns and his men were on their feet, and dashing through the doors of the building.

Inside it was pitch dark. But that was the way they liked to work. In the dark, where men learn fear. A knife is silent and terrible in the dark. They knew to the man how many would be in this building. The odds were only five to one against them. But they had surprise and vengeance eating at them. It made up for their lack of numbers.

The men of Mu died like flies, and with as little fight. It was over quickly. Not a single kilted warrior was left alive. Only the men of Burns' detail manned the machines and instruments and sent messages and received them. For weeks Burns had trained these men to operate in the dark. They could thread a needle without the aid of light.

BUT FOR Burns this was but the beginning of his task. He knew the blasting of the power house was the signal for the main body of guerrillas that their work was about to start. Burns dashed from the building for the arms depot a hundred yards off.

The only light on the vast field was moonlight, fitful and none too bright—the moon was in its last quarter—but it was enough for him to notice that many of the kilted warriors had escaped. Too many! Joe had managed to gain entrance to the depot, but that was all. As Burns ran he saw that the kilted men were already grouping for an assault against the building.

Throwing caution to the winds, Burns ran parallel to the advancing warriors of Mu, but stayed behind them some thirty yards. His goal was the special crew of men detailed to cover operations should something go wrong. They lay in the deepest shadows on the far side of the field. He ran full speed but there was a long,

worrisome two hundred yards to cover.

And suddenly chips of stone flew before him, and singing pellets whistled about his ears. He had been seen. He bent his head low and raced as he had never run before. Something tugged at his arm and another something tore skin from a thigh. But not one of the silent bullets hit a true mark.

Burns fell among the gun group and sprawled on his face.

"Get 'em," he growled hoarsely. "We've got the com. building."

The staccato thunder of the American machine guns split the night air asunder with their irragating sound. And the men of Mu melted under the hail of lead as ice does in a summer sun. But this time there was return fire. There was no sound to the enemy's guns. They were silent, high speed; the effect was terrific.

They used a high-powered shell of tremendous hitting power. When a man was struck by one of the shells it usually knocked him into the air and if an arm or leg was struck it tore the member from the body. Man after man died under the hail of fire. But for every man hit another took that one's place beside a gun. The crew at the arms depot had to be kept free.

Now there was a frontal fire. Joe and his boys had managed to get to the guns they wanted. The only sign of their fire was in the tiny flashes of flame shooting from the gun ports in the building. It had been a close race. But the men of Mu could not stand the cross fire and frontal both. One by one they got to their feet and ran. Not many escaped.

Ed Burns fell back against the body of one of his comrades. Blood seeped steadily from a wound high on his arm. And fire tore at his wounded thigh. But a smile was on his lips.

For he could see the first of the ships coming in. The air field had been taken....

COLONEL Larry Higgins watched the rest of the ships come in, a knot of excitement in his throat. God! What flyers! They came in at thirty-second intervals, landed and taxied to the end of the field where the men and their equipment were rushed off and assembled for immediate use by the vast crew of guerillas assigned to the work.

Larry's second stepped to his side.

"Looks like we're in, Larry," he said.

"Yeah. In like Flynn! The pilots got their orders?"

"Yep. They'll be taking off any second now."

"Good. Hunto and his boys'll be coming in to look at the show pretty soon now. Man oh man! These guerillas sure knew their work. Wonder who's boss man of the outfit?"

"I think they're bringing him over," said the other, pointing to a group coming in their direction.

Larry took one look at the man in the lead and raced forward and embraced him.

"Ed, Ed Burns! You're alive! They didn't get you after all. Oh, Lord, Ed! Tell me! Is Faith all right... your wife?"

"I—I don't know Larry. They took them both away. Bohar. He did it."

The world swam before Larry's eyes. The figure of the heavy-set man swayed as does a drunk. Then his vision cleared and he noticed that Burns was wounded.

"You've been hit! Jack! Get this man to first aid. And Jack...."

"Sir?"

"You're in charge now. I'm going into town. I've got a date with a man. A man named Bohar."

"Stay with Joe," Burns said, smiling suddenly. Everything was all right now. Larry was here. Larry wouldn't let Faith or Joan down. Not Larry. He would turn the town inside out. "Joe Bolchek knows every trick in the book. Stay with Joe, Larry. He's the man in the arms depot."

Bolchek's eyes widened when Larry told him who he was and what he wanted of Joe. "Gonna be mighty rough," Joe said. "Mighty rough. We hit and run, y'know. Can't stay too long in one place."

"I don't want to stay too long in one place," Larry said. "All I want from you is to get me into the Stevens Hotel and give me ten men. With enough ammo to help. I'll do the rest."

Bolchek shook his head. He didn't like it. But this was the famous Larry Higgins. What the hell! Guys like Higgins could whip a hundred of these rats.

"Okay. Can do! But if you don't mind my asking, why the rush to get to the fire?"

"I got a date I've been held up on. And now it's time I kept it...."

BOHAR PACED the narrow space as if it were a cage. Hunto, eyes narrowed, watched the tremendous blaze at the north end of the town. Now and then Hunto would give the other a quick glance, then turn and watch the inferno of smoke and flame again. For the first time Hunto thought he had made a mistake. Suta was right. But Suta was dead. Bohar had seen to that.

"What is the latest, Hunto?" Bohar snarled as he turned to the commander of the air fleet.

"It's now or never," Hunto said. "We've lost all the other key cities. And my men report something new. A blanket of some strange power, a

hundred miles above the Earth's atmosphere. They can't break through."

"Blast them!" Bohar growled. "They've taken the space port on the west edge of the city, haven't they?"

"Yes. And they've landed several hundred thousand equipped troops. It's going to be a battle. I wish...." He stopped suddenly, realizing he had almost mentioned wishing Suta were there.

"Keep the fastest ship we have for escape," Bohar said. "If this thing goes against us altogether we'll have to get away."

"We might not," Hunto said. "Thus far we haven't been able to get a ship above the strange blanket. But I'll see to it a ship is in readiness anyway."

Every few seconds a messenger would arrive, hand his message to Bohar and dash away. Bohar would read them and tear them to bits. Not a single sector but that did not report being pressed. And asked for either more men or more weapons.

"How are the ray machines doing?" Bohar asked.

"Not too well. They've mounted long-range artillery and are shelling them with great effect. They've knocked out ninety per cent of them already."

Bohar's face became livid with fury. For an instant he opened his mouth to berate Hunto, but thought better of it. He might need this fool yet.

"We had better get rid of Todo and Mu," Hunto said suddenly.

"Why?"

"If we escape we must escape without them. We will no longer have the power."

Hunto was right, Bohar thought. If Mu and Todo were allowed to return Bohar would not last long on Mu. "You're quite right," Bohar said. "Stay here. I will take a squad of

men and get to the two of them...."

The gross figure in the green and grey toga turned to his companion and said:

"Greatness. I think Bohar has lost his gamble. He had Suta assassinated. It was a mistake. Suta was an excellent man."

"I am not sorry, Todo," Mu said. "Of course we will all go down with him. A pity. I would have liked to return to Mu but only with Bohar as captive."

THEY SHUDDERED as a terrific explosion ripped a building a couple of hundred yards off. The concussion almost lifted them from their feet and the huge white-stone building that had been Mu's palace shook to its foundations.

"Fairly close, that one," Mu said softly. "These Earthlings are fine fighters. I cannot help but admire them."

"One of those shells is going to strike this place soon," Todo said.

"H'm! It would be shame to let the innocent suffer or die. Let the women go. They will manage to find sanctuary."

Todo motioned with curving finger and one of the men-in-waiting stepped forward.

"Release the women," Todo said. "His Greatness does not wish to see them harmed."

"All, Sire?"

"Every one...."

The man sped off on his errand. Todo watched him until the door closed behind him and turned to Mu with a laugh. "The suiveling cowardly court followers will scream their shrill cries. Mu has betrayed them. Their soft bellies will quiver and shake with fear. If their women are gone who will protect them? Ha-ha!"

Mu smiled. Better to let the women

go. Ay! He could have his small revenge on Bohar after all. The Earth woman and her mother would escape the monster's clutches now....

JOAN BURNS looked wide-eyed at the man. She wanted to ask him to repeat what he had just said but was afraid to. Besides, the man was already on his way out. She turned to Faith, sitting calm and silent beside her. A great welling of pity for the girl made her eyes go wet suddenly.

"Come, dear," she said. "We are going home, now."

Faith was like a child. And like a child, she rose dutifully at the words. She took her mother's hand and followed her out of the chamber. The two women walked down the long, empty halls, the marble floor echoing their footsteps. Now and then other women passed them, running for safety, but Joan Burns and her daughter did not hurry as the others. Time no longer held meaning for them. And at last they came to the vast hall which was the lobby.

They were but ten feet from the huge double doors when they swung inward and a number of men marched in. Too late Joan recognized their leader. It was Bohar.

Bohar stopped stock still and looked at the two women, his face paling and after a moment blazing with fury.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"Home," said Joan Burns. "Wherever that is."

"Home! Not while I'm alive! Take these two along," Bohar threw over his shoulder at the leader of the squad.

Joan threw herself in front of her daughter. "No! She has suffered enough! You can't make her go back. It would be too cruel a thing."

"Take them along," Bohar said as he strode forward toward the corridor which would lead them to Mu and Todo's chambers.

Joan screamed as the men shoved her roughly aside. But Faith was silent and went along willingly. Sobbing wildly, Joan followed in their wake. And after a little while they stood before the doors to Mu's chamber.

Bohar motioned for his men to open the doors. There was an evil grin on his lips as he followed the others into the large room. The two men standing at the large window turned at the strange sound and waited calmly the coming of their executioner.

Bohar advanced into the room until he stood inches removed from the two men.

"I am come bringing fine news. The battle is going against Bohar," Bohar said.

"Did he think he could win out?" Todo asked.

Bohar shrugged his shoulders. The smile widened, broadened, until his whole face was occupied with it. "The six-headed God looks with disfavor on Bohar," Bohar said. "A pity. But life does not always move as we plan it. Only death. And for Todo and Mu death is not far off. But not for Bohar. Oh, no! He will escape. It is all ready for him. As I am ready for you."

"Come, dear and tried friends, a smile, a grimace of disdain for the vermin, Bohar, who has won out against you. Let not your spirits suffer."

"To the end, always Bohar, brag-gart, traitor, fool!" Mu said softly. "The game is not done, Bohar. Nor have you won yet. We are done, true, but you have not yet escaped."

"A pity that you are not as close to it as I," Bohar said. "Well, I cannot spend the day with you. The press of affairs. Londo..."

"Excellency . . . ?"

"The four of them. Make it quick. But also make it silent. The blades are sharp, I trust? I do not wish them to suffer long."

"Aye, Excellency. The blades are sharp and thirsty."

"Then I will leave them in your gentle care," Bohar said and, turning, started for the door.

LARRY followed Joe Bolchek warily down the street. The squad of twenty men stretched for a full hundred yards behind them. Now and then a shell landed with a growling, crunching smack, and dirt and stones flew in all directions. Above the sky was lighted now and then by flashes of orange and blue flame as the air fleets fought for the possession of the sky. But now it was a different story. For the most part the ships of Mu no longer possessed the ray machines and it was fighter pilot against fighter pilot, gun against gun. The odds were fairly even.

The twenty-two men had travelled a long way. Once they had had to fight themselves out of a dilemma when they let themselves get boxed in by a patrol. But luck smiled at them. A wayward shell struck a few feet from the enemy patrol and wiped it out. Three men had been wounded but not seriously.

Now they were at the river bank. Fires raged in the Loop area across the river. Now and then an explosion was heard and a cascade of flame, smoke and sparks lighted the sky. From this point to the lake they would be in constant danger. Bohar still controlled the Loop area.

"The hotel is directly east of us," Joe said. "But we'll have to come in on it from the south. Too risky trying to get to the opposite bank from here."

"How about the bridge at Roosevelt Road?" Larry asked.

"Nope! It's swim for us. We'll go in at Harrison Street."

They wormed themselves down to the bank and moved warily along the bank, now crawling over an obstruction, now waiting for the searchlights to pass them as they dug themselves into protecting cover. The four blocks took a full half hour to cover.

The river narrowed slightly, its oily surface smooth as a child's face. One by one they crawled into the water and, slowly, making as little motion as possible, swam across at a diagonal. There were machine gun nests for twenty yards to either side of the bridge.

As each man emerged from the water he dashed up the bank and under the wooden planks which covered the walk to the street level. Joe and Larry waited till the last of them showed up. And once more they were on their way, but this time at greater speed. For they would be safe under the boardwalk until La Salle Street.

"We'll use the subway," Larry said as they came to street level. "There used to be an entrance not far from here."

"All blocked up. This is the best way. There's nothing left standing, which means we'll have plenty of cover. I've come this way before. Just follow my lead . . ."

Joe was proved right. They neither met anyone nor saw anyone while they were making their way to Michigan Boulevard. But the instant they came to the wide front of the Boulevard Joe stopped them.

"It's every man for himself from here on. Too many patrols. The Stevens is headquarters for all the big shots. And the street is lousy with guards."

But Larry wasn't listening. He had

caught sight of a squad of men marching across the street. They were headed for the towering bulk of a white building a block south. What had made Larry stop was the figure who stepped at the head of the squad. It was the man Larry had come in search of, Bohar.

"There, Bohar. Across the street. We've got to follow them."

JOE LOOKED right and left, spotted the old entrance to the I. C. and motioned with his head for Larry to follow. But this time they were observed. They made the entrance but directly behind came the guards, bellying for them to stop.

"Go on," Joe said, shoving at Larry. "Take ten of the boys. The rest of us will cover for you. Luck. And give him a good stab for me, the dirty dog!"

Larry and his men dashed down the length of the tunnel. It was in complete darkness but he knew there was an exit to the east side of the street. They came up and ran for the cover of the bushes lining the parkside. Just in time. The shouts of the guards had brought a whole platoon of them on the run. Joe was caught securely in a trap.

Larry and his men waited until the last of the guards disappeared into the darkness of the exit before following in the footsteps of Bohar and his men. Time after time they were forced to throw themselves into the bushes to escape observation. But always they managed to do it in time. And in the end they were a hundred feet from Bohar as the others entered the vast building.

"A moment," Mu called, stopping Bohar at the door.

Bohar returned and waited for the other to continue.

"...Yes?" Bohar asked.

"Remember the saying, 'A traitor dies a traitor's death'. So will it be with you."

"Is that why you called me back? Is that your idea of a plea for your life?"

"No! I will not beg from you. Not even for my life. I wanted but to remind you. And now, traitor, good-bye."

Bohar made a face of disgust. Time was wasting. Hunto was waiting his return. The ship was being loaded for the return trip. Once more Bohar started for the door. Nor did he look back to watch the execution.

But he did not quite reach the door before it crashed inward. Men dashed in, men with guns in their hands, guns which spoke harshly and loudly, filling the room with thunder. And in the lead was the man he had thought dead, Larry Higgins.

"This one is mine," Larry shouted in strident tones. "I want Mu and the other alive."

Bohar's eyes went wide and filled with fear. He saw his men fall under the vicious and accurate fire. Not a man escaped. He began a slow retreat toward the rear of the room. And Larry stalked the man as a cat does a mouse. Bohar's retreat was halted by the wall he bumped into.

"Bohar," Larry called softly, as he stopped also, a few feet from the other. "Look!" His hand came up out of his pocket and something lay in its palm. It was a stick of gum. The label on it said Higgins' Chicle Gum. "A stinking piece of gum. That's why you came. For this. And because of it millions of people have died. Because of it you're going to die."

Bohar swallowed painfully. He read the death in this man's eyes. If only he had a chance to draw the knife hidden in the sheath beneath his outer garment. There was a small chance.

He put out a hand in supplication.

"Please," Bohar said. "I meant nothing by it. I meant no harm. Surely you can see my position...?"

Larry smiled shallowly and advanced another foot. He hurled the knife and pistol from him. Now his hands were hooked, outstretched for the throat of the man against the wall. And Bohar's smile answered his in triumph as Bohar reached with a lightning-like gesture for the knife.

"Watch him!" Mu shouted in warning as he saw the swift movement.

THE WARNING shout saved Larry's life. For he was coming in and would have impaled himself on the weapon. A swift leap to one side and the blade missed him by only inches. Then Larry had Bohar's wrist and they were wrestling back and forth.

Larry held Bohar's knife hand in a grip of steel. But Bohar was fighting for his life now. He kned and gouged at Larry's face with his free hand, and as they came close Bohar tried to sink his teeth in Larry's throat. Nothing availed him. Larry twisted with inexorable force and suddenly the knife fell from the numb fingers.

Then Larry moved with blinding speed. One hand shot behind Bohar and the other took him by a wrist and with a single movement Larry threw the other across his hip and held him there.

Larry pressed the body of the man downward. Inch by inch Bohar's back bent like a bow drawn back. Inch by inch until the pain of it forced shrieks from his lips. Slowly, inexorably, the body bent, until at the end there was the nerve-tearing sound of the snapping of the man's vertebrae. And Larry flung the man's body from him with a gesture of disgust.

"Larry! Larry!" the woman's voice

made him turn as if he were in a trance.

"Mrs. Burns.... Faith!" the last came from him in a wild scream of joy. He dashed forward and took the girl in his arms. But after a second he released her. His eyes questioned her mother silently.

"Since they told her of your supposed death," Mrs. Burns said.

"Yes," said a new voice. They turned to see Mu standing at their shoulders. "Bohar caused her loss of memory. I let her stay this way, though I could have had her cured. She was in a better world. Now.... Todo. Here, please."

The gross figure stepped forward.

"Make her well," Mu commanded.

Todo took Faith's face between the palms of his hands, pressed on a nerve. His voice, low and full, summoned her from the depths of her madness. Larry and the girl's mother watched in amazement as suddenly Faith's eyes opened wide. And with a startled cry of gladness Faith threw herself in Larry's arms, crying:

"I knew they lied. You are here, my beloved."

Larry cradled the figure close, and said over Faith's shoulder:

"I owe you a debt I can never repay. Ask what you will."

"No, my friend," Mu said. "What has happened must be paid for. Give us a short time and we will see to it that the fighting ends. Then, whatever punishment is ours, will be ours."

THE SUNSET sky was a blaze of color. Below, the waters of the small lake reflected the colors of the sky. The man and woman sat on the railing, and looked down into the waters. His arms were about her waist.

"It seemed like an eternity ago, doesn't it, my dear?" Faith Higgins asked her husband.

"Yes," came the low reply. "Y'know. Mu wasn't a bad egg. But we had to do what we did. He was responsible for what happened."

A man and woman strolled out onto the porch and joined the other two. The man's arm was in a sling.

"Ed was saying he just got word that they are starting to rebuild Chicago. And that, shortly, he hopes to have our place built again. We just want you both to know that our home is your home."

The two on the railing smiled at each other.

"Mother... Dad," Larry said, as his arm tightened about the waist of the beautiful woman who was his wife.

"We love you both, as we should. But really. We came here for a rest. And when we leave it will be on a honeymoon. You wouldn't want us to stay with you on a honeymoon, would you?"

Ed Burns laughed loudly as he took his wife's arm and led her from the porch. His voice came to them from the door as the two passed into the room beyond:

"Now mother! They've never had a day together. Love must be served. And even a man's mother and father-in-law are not welcome in a case like this. Have fun, children."

We will, thought Larry as his arm tightened and his lips sought hers. We will, sighed Faith as she answered the pressure of her man's mouth...

THE END

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POWER—

For Tomorrow's Auto

NO ONE WITH a speculative turn of mind can look at the modern automobile without asking himself what the future holds for its development. Clearly the automobile is going to be with us for many decades to come, even with the slowly and surely rising competition of the ubiquitous helicopter. Undoubtedly that machine holds the heart of the future, but the auto is going to be with us for a long time. What will happen to it? Will it still retain its present shape? Its motive power?

Questions like these can be answered because the design of mechanical apparatus has reached a point where simple rule-of-thumb ideas no longer apply and where

scientific principles are utilized more and more.

First, look at shape. The trend towards boxiness, towards square lines, is not a retrogression. Rather, it expresses the function of the automobile, which is to carry people and things at moderate speeds from one place to another. It is not to be built on aerodynamic principles since it is not, and will not be, designed for aerodynamic speeds. The so-called "streamlining" of cars is a joke, a misapplication of otherwise sound ideas.

Motive power is perhaps where we shall see the greatest changes. The gasoline engine is slowly and surely reaching a point of maximum development beyond which changes can only be minor and almost pointless. When, three decades or more ago, chance switched the development of power from steam to gasoline, the crude internal-combustion engine, perhaps an error was made. Many engineers hold this view. As a consequence, independent thinkers are once more turning to an analysis of the steam-powered car, as different from its predecessors as the jet engine is from a reciprocating one. It is quite probable that, with the advancement of the "flash boiler," the old steam engine, with its infinitely smoother and more powerful operation, its simplicity, its reliability, will make an astounding come-back.

Only one probability exists to challenge this idea. That is the gas turbine. This ingenious—and proper—use of liquid fuel in a rotary machine, with simplicity and efficiency, stands a good chance of revolutionizing the automobile. Whether the gas turbine drives the wheels through gears directly, or whether it operates an electric generator powering individual electric motors on each wheel, is not basically important. It is, however, going to be used on a large scale for car and truck motive power.

The one development which will really make the car of the future is the discovery of an electric storage device so that large amounts of electric energy may be carried. In such a case—and it is not impossible nor even improbable—the electric motor will have achieved its ultimate end so far as car power is concerned.

Atomic energy stands small chance for car power—unless it is to serve as a heat-source for a steam-electric combination.

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(cont'd from page 81)

Dear Editor:

Well, I finally read some more stories in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. I'm speaking of the July issue, with "The Spectre of Suicide Swamp", by E. K. (Robert Moore Williams) Jarvis. That was a very good yarn, LES. Not too hacky at all. The cover was pretty good, too. Popp is a pretty good artist.

"Temptation" by William Morrison was pretty good, though not the type of story I'll remember years from now. Rather pleasant, is all. I liked the illustration for this, too. Bill Ashman shows promise.

"One Guitar" was excellent. Sam Merwin, Jr., is one of the better writers of the day, I think, when he takes his time with a story. His characterization is very good, and his plots novel.

Hey, I hear FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is going to fold, LES! I presume this is because of FANTASTIC? This I am glad of, for FA would never have been able to hold a candle to FANTASTIC.

I hear that FANTASTIC will go bimonthly. Good. Please don't make it a monthly, though. I don't think there would be enough good stuff then. Since STARTLING STORIES has gone monthly its stories have dropped slightly in quality. I wouldn't like to see that happen to FANTASTIC, which I consider the best magazine Ziff-Davis ever put out (except maybe for those late-1950 and early-1951 issues of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES). Leave FANTASTIC on a bimonthly basis and AMAZING as a monthly. FANTASTIC can print the more adult stuff and leave the space opera to AS.

Terry Carr
134 Cambridge Street
San Francisco, California

MORE GORODS PLEASE

Dear Editor:

How delightful was Lawrence Chandler's story "Is This the Way Home" in your October issue of FA! I was entertained no end. Can't you get another with more gorods in it? Or maybe the same two? I also liked very much the Jarvis story, and the one by Doris Kaye.

Didn't care for Rog Phillips' or the Cox story, but it might've been me instead of them, just didn't take to either one particularly.

I'd like to exchange letters with any reader of sf who would care to write, as writing is rather a hobby with me, and I don't circulate socially to any extent. Sf is my favorite type of reading, I like astrology, and I like people. (Maybe I'm old enough to know better, but I still do.)

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—Ed.

WANTS MORE MILTON

Dear Ed:

I just got your July issue—I haven't read it yet (I always read the letters first) but it looks pretty good.

Talking about the letters—What the heck happened? Seven measly letters—you can do better than that! All the letters stank except the one that didn't have any name; I don't see why it didn't have any name—it was the best letter. I guess I liked it best because—I'm always glad to see a letter commenting on Milton Lesser. He is the best!

In FA June there was a story by Milton Lesser that stank. I then read AS (July). In it was the sequel to "The Secret of the Black Planet"—that made up for it 100%. (It was Lesser at his best.) I want more Lesser.

Now, getting back to the letters, in the July issue of IMAGINATION they had twenty-four letters. Why can't you do that? Also, I wonder if there is any sf fan club in Oakland, Berkeley or San Francisco? Please contact me—I want to join one, if possible.

I wonder if I could obtain the March issue of AS and FA (52). Also, is there anyone who can sell or give me any AS and FA magazines that have Milton Lesser stories in them?

I am 13, and want someone under 15 to write to, please.

I noticed that there was a lot of discussion on the fact of covers and illustrations—I think they are...fair. Except the covers are always on something very unimportant in the story. In the June AS, on the cover, you had the man and woman. Now here is the criticism. The man was supposed to be a strong, loaded-with-muscles man, and he sure didn't look like it; and the girl was supposed to have brown hair—and she had blonde on the cover.

Hope you print this.

Alfred Pérez

3116½ Harrison Street
Oakland 11, California

As soon as Milt Lesser gets through helping Uncle Sam, he'll be back with us—bigger and better than ever.
—Ed.

HELLFIRE AND BRIMSTONE

By WALT CRAIN

WHETHER this is indicative of the current state of our civilization or not, "brimstone" (we know it as sulfur) is what makes the wheels of modern technology go around. This humble chemical has been so long with us, has been so plentiful and cheap, and so intimately mixed up in everything, that we have just about forgotten about it. However, it's calling our attention to itself in a particularly nasty way - we're running out of it!

Well, not exactly. There's plenty of sulfur in the world. But most of it's combined with iron in the familiar form of iron pyrites, or "fools' gold." Till now most sulfur has come directly from the fabulous "mines" of Texas and Louisiana, where boiling water and steam are pumped into holes in the Earth and incredible quantities of fluid sulfur come to the surface. The only catch is that these mines are running "dry." That means refineries are going to have to be built to convert iron pyrites to the mineral. Sulfur is used mainly for sulfuric acid and for fertilizers. The former makes any modern country run. Without it, nothing can be made. Cheap sulfur helped the world a lot.

MIGHTY MAGNESIUM

By JON BARRY

MAGNESIUM METAL, which has all the properties of aluminum, -and then some! -is being used on an ever-increasing scale. The aircraft industry took this metal to its bosom during the war and, ever since, airplanes have used it in quantity. It's stronger than aluminum, lighter, and has similar anti-corrosive properties. Alloyed with aluminum it's widely used. Also, it's getting cheaper all the time. But, oddly enough, you don't see as much of this metal in everyday life as you'd expect - why?

The drawback for a long while has been the fact that magnesium is flammable. Everyone recalls that time honored and impressive chemical lab: light a thin strip of magnesium and it burns with an intense flame. Consequently, because of this flammable property, manufacturers have kept away from it. But actually that's an error. Magnesium burns, it is true, but only when it is in very, very thin strips or fine shavings. In solid sheets, for example, those over a tenth of an inch thick, there is no danger whatsoever. Pushing this idea to the limit, the government and associations of manufacturers are encouraging appliance builders to use magnesium for their products without any fear of fire at all so long as they stay away from thin strips.

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Fantastic
Combination
By MORT DALY

NOT SO familiar to the general public, but a miracle nevertheless, is the blend of glass with iron. It has no particular trade name, is used in a multitude of products, but because of its humble functions, its role isn't recognized in modern technology. Glass fused to iron has long been the dream of industrialists, and the last ten years or so have seen its widespread use.

Certain glasses have the property of fusing themselves and bonding perfectly to ordinary sheet steel. The resultant material has all of the strength of iron with all of the non-corrodibility of glass. It is used in hot water tanks, in beer vats, and all over the chemical industry in general. Certain metal tiles are made from it. It stands extremely wide temperature ranges without the glass separating from the metal. In other words it is a remarkably versatile material.

★

BIG inventory
By A. T. KEDZIE

A GRIM, realistic—and yet encouraging —note was sounded recently in the newspapers which released a report that the city of New York was inventorying its entire stock of available tools, in readiness for the possible contingency of an atom-bomb attack. This matter-of-fact report showed better than anything else the seriousness with which civic leaders with foresight take the possibility of atomic bombing, and above all it demonstrates a fearless, sound and logical approach to what can be a very nasty problem.

The New York inventory requires that all public and private contractors register the amount, type, quality and condition of their equipment with a central city bureau. Everything is recorded, from crowbars to steam shovels; every conceivable type of mobile tool, jack-hammer, compressor, drill —you name it. If it can be used in rescue or salvage work, it is filed in the master index and kept located and up to date by a simplified recording system.

Should catastrophe strike, these implements will be immediately available for use, since it is assumed that a sort of martial law will apply at once, though the owners would of course be more than glad to cooperate in the smallest detail.

★

WOULD YOU LIKE TO MAKE \$1,000 A MONTH?

That's what Stanley Hyman made selling the amazing new **PRESTO Fire Extinguisher!**



Stanley Hyman

"I have been selling the Presto Fire Extinguisher for well over a year and have found it to be the fastest money-maker and quickest-selling item ever produced. If a man demonstrates it intelligently, sales follow automatically."

"I have made an excellent living with the Presto Fire Extinguisher, having made over \$1000 a month. Presto is a 'natural' for any salesman."

STANLEY HYMAN



CHARLES KAMA

This Presto salesman from Texas was featured as "Salesman of the Month" on the front cover of a sales magazine. He told the magazine's reporter: "I think I've succeeded pretty well. I'm making more than a thousand dollars a month—and I haven't touched bottom yet."

WOULDN'T YOU like to be making the kind of money Stanley Hyman made? His story printed at right is just one example of the brilliant success that Presto salesmen are meeting everywhere! A Florida salesman earned \$800 in one month. An Ohio man earned \$2100 in 2 months. A New Hampshire salesman added the Presto as a sideline and picked up an extra \$1800 in 20 months.

What Is the Secret?

PRESTO contains an amazing new chemical—"Chlorobromomethane" or "C.B." developed as a secret defense against fire during the war.

In comparing effectiveness of "C.B." in fighting various kinds of fires an authoritative testing laboratory report states: "It has been proved that 'C.B.' is about 1.5 to 6 times as effective as other common extinguishing agents on an equal weight basis."

This extra effectiveness of "C.B." means that Presto can be made light and handy enough for even a woman or child to use. Just a twist of the knob...and flames disappear! "Sells on sight" to Civil defence workers, owners of homes, cars, stores, farms, service stations, boats, motorcycles, factories, offices.

Why Large Presto Profits Are So Easy

Everyone is terrified at the very thought of FIRE! Every year fire kills more than 11,000 people. Over half women and children! Civilian Defense authorities have said that in the event of atomic attack regular fire fighting forces will be fighting large fires and that the people must be equipped to take care instantly of the little fire that might so easily become a big one. Most people who see Presto in action want one or more—ESPECIALLY WHEN THE PRICE IS ONLY \$3.98 EACH!

Over One Million Prestos Already Sold!

You can demonstrate Presto in a few minutes, and every sale will net you \$1 or more. We re-fill your Demonstrator free and give you dramatically powerful printed sales material to "talk from"...free certificates testifying that Presto is GUARANTEED FOR 20 YEARS.

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